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THE

METHODIST ITINERANCY.

THE

METHODIST ITINERANCY.

IS A MODIFICATION OF IT DESIRABLE AND PRACTICABLE?

A DISCUSSION

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INTRODUCTORY.

The articles which follow have been printed in The Independent, and are reproduced in this form because of their value and for the sake of convenient use and preservation. They were written at the request of the Editor, by representative men in the Methodist Episcopal Church, who wrote independently one of another. The subject, by common consent, is one of the most important in the history of Methodism and one which must receive the attention and careful consideration of the great Church whose General Conference is about to meet in Cincinnati. In no other journal or periodical has there been so full a discussion, by so many able writers, of the question whether the Itinerancy can and should be modified. Methodist papers and ministers were pleased to refer in terms of praise to the articles as they appeared from week to week in The Independent. We hope that in the present form the articles may have a still wider usefulness and a still better appreciation.

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A MODIFICATION OF THE ITINERANCY DESIRED AND NEEDED.

BY THE REV. C. N. SIMS, D.D.

Is a modification of the rule which restricts the pastoral term of a minister in any charge to three years in any consecutive six desirable? This question is at present being widely considered in Methodism. It is important, at the beginning, to avoid mistaking its meaning.

It does not look at all in the direction of a settled pastorate, nor toward any interference with the appointing power. Its advocates are as firm believers in itinerancy as its opponents. It simply raises the question: Shall the bishop be permitted to appoint a minister to any charge beyond three years, if it seems to him necessary to do so? In other words, shall the continuance of a pastor beyond three years be invariably negatived by a rule, or left to the wisdom of the bishop and his cabinet?

At present the bishop has full power to appoint all ministers where he thinks they are most needed, except pastors and presiding elders whose terms have expired; and these he may send anywhere, except to their last charges. The friends of modification desire to enlarge the power of the bishops by removing these exceptions. They ask that this class of appointments be left to the wisdom of the appointing power, as all others are; that they be determined by existing facts, not by an inflexible rule; and for a complete, instead of a limited appointing power, which shall consider every appointment every year, and make such provision for it as seems best, all things considered. We believe that some such modification would be of great practical value to the Church.

The question of extending the possible period of the pastoral term is not a new one. It has been before the Church at frequent intervals during its whole history; and, with one or two exceptions, the action taken has always been toward such extension. At first it was usage to make changes every half year, at the furthest, and they were often made at the end of three months.

In 1794 this note appears in the "Annual Minutes": "The bishop and conferences desire that the preachers would *generally* change every six months, by order of the presiding elder, *whenever it can be made convenient.*" Thus moving slowly and cautiously in the direction of longer pastoral terms.

In 1804 the limit was fixed at *two successive* years, after which the preacher was expected to be removed quite out of the neighborhood. This sentiment, somewhat modified, found expression in a resolution passed by the General Conference in 1836, to the effect that it was "against the genius of Methodism to continue a preacher for *many years* in succession in the same city, town, or district, and the bishops were advised to conform their appointments to this idea. *Now* a minister may spend his whole ministeral life in one city.

In 1864 the limit was placed, where it now stands, at three years in any six.

Early in the history of the Church began a system, which has steadily grown, of exempting *traveling preachers,* holding certain positions, from the rule requiring changes; but these men, while not directly in the pastorate, were yet members of the traveling connection and received their appointments annually, like their brethren, at the hands of the bishop.

Embraced in the list of exceptions are editors and assistant editors; agents of the Book Concern; corresponding secretaries of connectional societies; home and foreign missionaries; chaplains to prisons, charitable, sanitary, and reformatory institutions, and in the army and navy; preachers appointed to labor among colored people, seamen, and in neglected and destitute parts of cities, at Five Points, New York, and the American Chapel in Paris; teachers and presidents of institutions of learning and agents for Bible, temperance, and other societies. Indeed, the exceptions seem to cover all kinds of work a traveling preacher may lawfully engage in, except the pastorate and presiding eldership. About three hundred traveling preachers, many of them among the most prominent in the denomination, are now working under these exceptions.

When we remember that, whatever

reasons are assigned for limiting the pastoral term—such as giving all ministers an equal chance for all places, undue accumulation of personal influence, the necessity of fresh intellect in all fields, motives for diligence on account of shortness of time—all apply with peculiar force to many of these positions—such as editors, chaplains, agents, secretaries, etc.—it will be seen that the logical effect of these exceptions is toward according the same liberty to those engaged in the pastoral work. Why should an editor be allowed to *write* his sermons to the same congregation for twelve years, and a pastor be permitted to preach his but for three?

Another practice which has grown up among us shows the tendency of the Church toward extending the possible limits of the pastoral term. It is the "*pendulum*" system, by which a minister oscillates between two charges, requiring three years to make the beat. Many instances have occurred where a minister has divided his services *for twelve consecutive years between two charges*, and he might continue to swing between the two indefinitely. Instances are known where the pastor has bidden a cheerful adieu to his congregation, at the close of his term, with the confident expectation, indulged both by him and his people, that at the end of three years he would be back to resume his labors among them; and such expectations have not always been disappointed. This is practical extension in broken doses. Though the Church does not permit a minister to stay more than three years, it will allow him a year or three years of idleness, while he waits the passing of the intervening period until he is eligible to return. Ministers among us are now on such "waiting orders," while we are not without example of a minister thus employing the whole time between one term and his *next* in the same charge. It is thus seen that the Church has steadily marched, both by law and usage, toward longer pastoral terms; and now comes the demand for still larger freedom in this matter.

What evidence exists that there is at present any widespread desire for modification? Let the following facts answer.

Within two or three years the question has been discussed in the Methodist Preachers' Meetings in nearly, if not quite, all the great cities of the country—New York, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Baltimore, and many others; and in every case the discussion has awakened great interest and developed a strong sentiment in favor of modification. For the last five years occasional contributed articles, by leading ministers, have appeared in our various Church papers, favoring it. The subject has been before at least two annual conferences, by request of the laity; and strong men have there advocated the change.

Within a year past public meetings of laymen have been held in the city of Brooklyn to consider the question, and a society, embracing many prominent men in the Church, has been formed for the purpose of securing a change of the limitation, and is now vigorously at work for that end. Some of the very eminent laymen of the denomination have delivered addresses, which have been printed, favoring the change.

A series of vigorous articles on the same side from another prominent layman is at present appearing in the columns of *The Methodist*, which has given much space and consideration to the subject and strongly favors the movement.

The subject has been discussed more or less in nearly all Methodist papers, in some of which able editorials have appeared in sympathy with the movement,

That the subject has not been discussed in the New York *Advocate* in the last three and a half years (in which we have not seen even an allusion to the Brooklyn organization) is probably due rather to the peculiar views of the editor than to any lack of general interest on the subject.

In the *New England Methodist* (Boston) of November, 1879, appeared a leading editorial, from which we extract the following:

"With many of our people there is a growing conviction that the exigencies of the work demand an extension of the pastoral term. If there be any such demand, there is no valid reason why the change should not be effected. All that may be reasonably asked is that the matter be maturely considered, and that the change, if made, be in a form that will work no damage to other parts of the economy, especially to the efficiency of the itinerant system, which has proved so beneficial to our cause. The term might be tentatively extended to five or seven or ten years, instead of three; or the extension might be conditional on the request of an annual conference in case of particular churches. Some modification seems inevitable. The appended note from a leading minister in one of the New En-

gland conferences indicates the drift of thought in high places:

"'It is every year more and more apparent that the three-years limitation of ministerial service must be modified. Divine Providence should not be bounded and shut up by the present rule. The necessities of the work often demand that a minister should stay more than three years in one charge. The usefulness of many men would be increased by less frequent changes. This continual moving is a useless wear and tear of soul, body, and purse. It is just as bad as it can be for those who preach in small country places, and is worse in city churches, with city pastors. It is killing to ministers' wives and bad every way.

"'On the supposition that a minister is acceptable and doing good service, and the church is harmonious and satisfied, it is a wicked waste of time and strength and money to change as often as once in three years. A removal of all limitations is not asked nor desired; but let us try a five-years term, instead of three. Wherever the word 'three' is used in the Discipline in connection with the term of ministerial service, let the word 'five' be inserted. Don't let any be afraid that the itinerant system will be destroyed. It did not destroy it to change from two to three, and it will not to change from three to five.'

"We ask the next General Conference to try the experiment."

It is also within the knowledge of the writer, and of most ministers, that individual churches have appealed to their presiding bishops, seeking some lawful means of retaining their pastor beyond the period of limitation, fearing great disaster in case of change. We, therefore, conclude that the question is regarded with great interest by ministers, conferences, churches, laymen, and the press, and that the desire for modification is widespread and strong.

Less attention has been given to methods than to the merits of the question, the friends of the movement believing that when once the Church becomes fully awake to the advantages of the change it will not be difficult to find a safe way of accomplishing it; yet there has been no lack of methods proposed. Among many, we note the following:

1. To permit the annual conference to vote an extension when, in its judgment, any case demands it.

2. To present all cases of the desired extension to the semi-annual meeting of the bishops next preceding the conference at which they will be asked, and allow the extension to be made only by the action of the board of bishops.

3. To extend the limit to five, seven, or ten years.

4. To remove the limitation absolutely, and make the appointments annually, leaving the question of time wholly to the discretion of the appointing power.

For what reason is a removal of the limitation of the pastorate asked?

Generally because there are cases where a longer pastorate than is now permitted appears to be not only desirable, but necessary to the best interests of the Church.

I. Frequently the same reasons for which an appointment is originally made continue beyond the limitation.

Some of these are:

1. The supposed eminent adaptation of a man for a place. This is the strongest reason that can be given for his first appointment to any charge. Places have peculiar needs and men special gifts. At one point the Church is distracted by dissensions, and a certain minister has special gifts as a peacemaker; therefore, a reason for sending him there.

At another point a new church is to be built, and a pastor of business ability, tact, and leadership is wanted. Here, the congregation is small, and requires a man who can gather the people. There, a society lacks social recognition and influence, and a man who possesses qualities which command these is sent. Skepticism prevails in a community, and a man strong in convincing and popular argument is detailed for duty there. The Sunday-school is inefficient, and one who is pre-eminently a Sunday-school man is needed; therefore, sent. Financial ability or availability is lacking in a church, and a man wise in these matters is put in charge. Thus the whole field is studied with a view of adapting men to places. Happy are the church and minister who find this purpose of the appointment realized. If experience vindicates the wisdom of the arrangement, the man is sent back a second and a third year. Does not the continuance of that adaptation, now thoroughly tested and known, furnish as strong a reason the fourth year as at any preceding time? If a man is found well suited to a charge, it is common sense to continue him there until the special work for which he was sent is completed, or his efficiency is impaired, or he is more needed elsewhere, or another is found who can do that work better. Thus the indications of Providence can always be consulted and a reason given for every appointment.

2. The wish of the people is a reason for making appointments. That the people of any charge, especially of a prominent one, believe a minister would be well adapted to them is usually considered a strong reason

for so appointing him; and this continues to hold for the second and third year. If at the end of that time, now that they thoroughly know him, their desire continues, it becomes a stronger and more intelligent reason for sending him again to them than ever before. If it were ever a reason for his appointment, why not again? Besides these reasons that remain from year to year, there are other obvious ones for removing the restriction—such as

II. Reappointments required by special emergencies.

1. Recent revivals. If, when the time limit is reached, a revival is in progress or has recently occurred, it seems almost a direct contravention of Providence to remove from his charge the pastor upon whose work God is in the act of setting the seal of his approval. His relations to the young convert whom he has just led to Christ, to the community over which the Holy Spirit has given him such power for good, to the Church who are marching with him to battle and victory cry out against the unnecessary and hurtful change. It is like deposing a general in the midst of his triumph on the field.

2. Church building and debt-paying enterprises. A minister has been sent to a congregation which has no suitable place of worship—probably sent because of that fact; and by his enterprise, influence, and wise management is found at the end of the third year with a good church edifice in process of erection and with well considered financial plans for paying for it. He has the enterprise in his hands, his head, his heart. Everybody believes him peculiarly qualified, both by natural gifts and circumstances, to complete the undertaking. Common sense and practical wisdom say: Let him finish his work. Why should the "rule," like a chairman's gavel, call "time up," and turn over the unfinished work to one who knows neither the enterprise nor the people who are engaged in it? Many valuable churches are in distress to-day because just this has occurred in their history.

The same reason holds in debt-paying enterprises. A church is burdened with debt, which threatens bankruptcy. But the bishop sends a debt-paying preacher, who organizes his plans, arouses the enthusiasm of his people, and who, when his term expires, is moving grandly and successfully toward the accomplishment of his special task. If ever Providence indicates anything, it is the continuance of that man until his special work is done.

III. Removal of the limitation would utilize power now wasted.

1. It would utilize acquaintance and confidence.

Let it be remembered that this plea is for retaining a minister if the bishop thinks it best, all things considered. If it is judged best, for any cause, change him; but if he is exerting large religious influence on his people, and they desire his continuance, it is a great waste of power to remove him. He knows them, can call them by name; knows their children; knows their peculiarities, gifts, state of mind, history; has been with them in joy and sorrow; and they know, love, and trust him. Why waste all this power of acquaintance, confidence, knowledge, and pastoral sympathy? All ministers know how the former pastor is sent for the first year, or longer, after his removal, on special missions. To bury the dead, "because he knew them so well and was such a friend of the family"; to marry the young people, "because he received them into the Church"; to baptize the little ones, "because he married the parents"—what is this but the Church crying out in her holiest joys and sorrows against an arbitary destruction of the pastoral relation? The stranger is not made a pastor by appointment. He must grow to be one.

2. The quiet and efficiency of the Church is promoted.

A considerable part of the last year of a limited pastorate is, in most churches, a period of peculiar uneasiness and unrest. A committee has been appointed to select a minister for the next year, and its members, at least, have a distracting time. The history of such a committee, from the time of its appointment until its work is done, would be interesting and instructive, if its correspondence, visits, hearings of preachers, and consultations, trying to find the good and the bad, the strength and the weakness of preachers and their availability, could be known. The whole church share in greater or less measure the anxiety and curiosity incident to the situation, and their hopes and fears go forward to meet the new man. The pastor feels a peculiar depression, like a living wife preparing for her husband's next wedding. Who does not know that this state of restless expectancy is detrimental to steady, legitimate church-work? Would it not be

well to avoid this, whenever it can be done, by leaving a prosperous church and efficient pastor to go on quietly with their proper work?

3. It would give the church a continuous hold upon men.

Watch the changes in a congregation at the coming of a new man, the equal of his predecessor. Many familiar faces disappear, not finding their wants satisfied by the new, as by the old preacher. Many specially attached to the former by kindness or acquaintance, missing these, fall away. The unsteady and obscure, that had been hunted out and held up by years of effort, are unknown to the new pastor, and, therefore, being neglected, drift off; those "almost persuaded" lose interest. Meanwhile, new faces appear. Strangers come in, who are helped by the new man, and the new congregation is equal to the old. Now, consider the loss to those that are gone and to many that come, in the breaking up of church ties, acquaintance, attachments—for changing church homes is always a perilous thing—and do we not see that very strong reasons ought to exist before the change is made?

4. It preserves the minister's effectiveness in mature years. At fifty, the prudence, wisdom, and experience of a faithful minister are at their best; but something of his nimbleness is gone. He cannot flit about, speak names, and be as vivacious with strangers as one twenty-five years younger. Between him and the strange young people of his new charge is a gulf of thirty years, and it seems to them impassable from either side. His hair is gray, he wears spectacles, his deportment is dignified. How can they like him? And the officers of the church, who are always thinking of the needs of the young people, look for a "younger man." Give such a strong, ripe man a chance to stay where his worth is known, and he will continue to be useful and happy, loved and honored. Compel him to move often, and he is not wanted. This accounts for the startling fact that so few Methodist ministers (comparatively) retain in their ripe manhood the grade of charges they occupied in earlier years. We believe the proportion of effective elderly ministers is four times greater in other denominations than in ours. We believe that the time limitation costs the average elderly Methodist minister ten years of his best power and work.

Let any reader look about him, and see how many elderly men in other denominations hold prominent charges and are doing efficient work in them, and then how few Methodist preachers hold like prominent pastorates, and he will see the demonstration of this proposition before his own eyes.

5. The change would permit the Church to adapt its policy to the needs and tastes of every section.

The staid parts of the country, where permanency is valued, could be accommodated by longer terms; the newer parts, where change is preferred, by shorter ones. The preacher on a two-weeks circuit has an opportunity of preaching to a congregation but twenty-five times in a year; his brother in the station has one hundred such opportunities. In other words, the pastorate in the station is just four times as long, counting by opportunities, as that of the two-weeks circuit. Remove the limitation, and this inequality is corrected.

Surely, there are reasons enough for removing the limitation, unless great evils would thereby be introduced.

We will consider

IV. Objections to the change.

1. Let well enough alone. If what we have written is true, we have not attained to "well enough." Nothing is well enough that is not perfect, and even those who oppose the modification of the rule acknowledge that the limitation gives rise to serious difficulties.

2. It would be unfair to men in the less conspicuous charges. Faithful ministers constantly make their own charges better, and thus come up; and, besides, there will always be changes enough to give a chance to those who are strong and faithful.

3. It would create caste in the ministry, by showing that some men can stay longer than others. Let us be honest here. Efficiency and other qualities of character make differences in men. A rule cannot destroy these, as it does not create them. It is well for men to stand on their merits.

4. It would so interfere with the authority of the bishops that they could not exercise it according to their best judgment. If this be true, it is an unanswerable argument against the proposed change. But we deny it wholly. Ample constitutional power remains with the bishop, and the contempt of the whole Church would justly rest upon any man in that high position

who had not the courage and conscience to use it faithfully. It is an unworthy plea for incompetent bishops. Who would propose such a crutch for a judge of the Supreme Court? Have our bishops less courage and integrity?

But take another view. At present eighty per cent. of Methodist preachers are removed inside of three years, and, therefore, without the help of a limitation rule. Are the remaining twenty per cent. of preachers and churches—certainly as true as the first—so disloyal that they will not submit gracefully to authority? We repel the insinuation. They will obey orders in the future, as in the past.

5. Some of the stronger charges would keep certain strong men. Some of them do it now six years in twelve, and it makes little difference to the average preacher whether his fortunate brother takes his six years in a popular church in one term or two.

6. It paves the way for heresy and ministerial unfaithfulness. We would not name this but for the fact that it appears in an article in the *Methodist Quarterly* for January, 1880, from which we quote: "But great changes would surely be introduced in Methodist usages, doctrine, and discipline. One minister, believing in the annihilation of the wicked; another, preaching hope for all; another, winking at dancing, card-playing, theatergoing; a fourth, indifferent to class-meetings—these could all and easily stamp their peculiarities on their congregations, and great dissimilarity in usages, doctrine, and discipline would soon appear." This is a mild and harmless joke, which nobody will mistake for an argument, as it is generally known that Methodism has a more prompt and vigorous way of dealing with heresy and misdemeanors than cutting their tap-roots and transplanting them every three years. This would be like curing the effect of immoral literature by allowing a boy to keep the bad book only a month, and then pass it on to his neighbor.

7. It will destroy the itineraney. No; it will perfect it. An annual review of the whole field; every charge and every minister wholly in the hands of the bishop and his advisers, to make the appointments as he deems best, giving every man a place and every place a man, with no limitations on the free and godly judgment of the appointing power—this is itineraney completed, not destroyed.

We believe we have reviewed every objection yet made to change which possesses any force whatever. The change will come soon, and it will not hurt the Church. It will not permit any man to stay when the Church says he must go. It will clear our rule of cumbersome exceptions and put all traveling preachers on an equality. It will enable the bishops to follow the order of Providence and act always for cause. It will remove the only unreasoning feature from the itineraney, and, by completing it, make it the most perfect system of ministerial appointment in the world.

THE ITINERANCY DEFINED AND DEFENDED.

BY DANIEL CURRY, D.D., LL.D.

THE words that form the heading of this page constitute the proper name of a well-known ecclesiastical institution. That name indicates the organic body of the ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church of this country (other Methodist bodies, in this and other countries, have also their "itinerancies," kindred in character, but organically distinct), with its specific laws of life and modes of action. The name is simply the verbal designation of the aggregated unity of the associated body of "traveling" ministers of one of the numerically largest Christian denominations of the land, which body acts and is governed according to methods and laws peculiar to itself. To be a Methodist minister is not the same with belonging to the "itinerancy," for there are more recognized ministers of the Methodist Episcopal Church that are not of the itinerancy than there are in that body. Ministers belonging to the itinerancy are known as "traveling" ministers or preachers; those not of the itinerancy are styled "local" ministers or preachers. As an organization, the itinerancy is a close corporation, into which new members are admitted only by the suffrages of regularly constituted tribunals, made up exclusively of members of the body; and, when so admitted, no member can be excluded, except after due conviction by his peers of crime, or heresy, or disobedience to the regulations of the body. This body of ministers are, also, by the organic laws of the denomination, the pastors of all the "societies" or local churches; but, for the better prosecution of their work, each minister is annually assigned to a given field, for the performance of his duties as a preacher, and pastor, and administrator of affairs. Every traveling minister is entitled to an appointment, which he must accept and occupy; and the churches, having entered into the organism, must receive, in their proper relations, the ministers so appointed over them. In this organization there are now more than ten thousand traveling preachers, and some fifteen thousand local churches, and an aggregate lay membership of more than a million and a half. The ruling idea of Methodism is its organic unity—its solidarity—as contradistinguished from the individual completeness of the several local churches, which distinguish its ecclesiastical opposite—Congregationalism.

Of the comparative excellence or otherwise of this system nothing needs now to be said, as the purpose of this paper is simply to show what it is and what are the conditions required for its practical efficiency and its perpetuation. Its right to be is assumed for the present; and, therefore, in our discussion of the subject, whatever may appear to be essential to its successful action and its maintenance must be accepted as of paramount importance. Anything, however good and desirable in itself, and though confessed valuable and expedient in other conditions, if found to be incompatible with or even unfriendly to the workings of the itinerancy, must be discarded. For the present it is to be assumed, for the sake of the discussion, that the system must be preserved and operated according to its proper requirements, and that whatever interferes with its free action must be accounted an evil, to be resisted and, if possible, eliminated from the body. At another time we may open the whole question of its right to be, which we shall defend simply on the ground of expediency, within the proper exercise of Christian liberty, the whole being justified by results already achieved and the promise of still greater achievements in the future.

In Methodism the individual is always subordinated to the organic body, and the interests of the local society or church to those of the whole denomination. Because of the compactness of the organization, the whole ministerial force belongs equally to every part, and each local church in all the land is potentially subject to the pastorate of each minister. The whole practical administration of affairs proceeds on this theory. It is not asked what may be best for this or that local church, nor yet how the talents of some particular min-

ister may be rendered most available, much less how may he achieve personal success and acquire a name. It may, indeed, thus happen that certain possible advantages must be foregone, and personal rights and liberties of action must be waived or held in abeyance; but, with all these incidental infelicities clearly apprehended, it is still deemed expedient to maintain the system. In this organizing and working of the Church's forces there is an evident analogy to military order and administration, its thoroughness of discipline, the subjection of personal preferences to general orders, and the surrender of the individual will to the regulations of the body, not to crush out liberty, but to secure effectiveness of action.

With this understanding and appreciation of the governing spirit and theory of the Methodist itinerancy kept constantly in mind, we shall be the better prepared to inquire what are the needful conditions for its proper exercise and vigorous life.

1. It is believed that the pastoral oversight of any particular congregation or church, which theoretically belongs alike to each minister, must not be allowed to become practically the specific work of some one minister. The distiuctive name, "itinerancy," must be more than a name, and the form of church life that it indicates must not be allowed to become merely nominal. It is well known that the natural tendency of all particular or local churches is to autonomy and independence; and it is also obvious that an undue development of this spirit in any considerable number of churches would be fatal to the practical workings of the itinerancy. It has, therefore, been judged to be necessary to keep up, among the whole body of the ministers, a systematic course of removals, at not infrequent intervals, so that no minister shall become identified with nor specially attached to any particular church, nor any church be permitted to lose its interest in the whole body of the ministers, any one of which may at any time become its special pastor. The *legal* liability of each minister to removal at any time is not alone sufficient to insure the practical mobility of the whole body, or any part of it that may be desired, in any case; and, without the mandatory force of law, compelling not infrequent changes, the natural tendency to localization would soon become too strong to be overcome. Even in the army and navy, while any one may be removed at any time, it has also been found necessary to provide, by a standing law or general order, that beyond a given term (three years) no one may be continued at the same post. The effective working of such a system demands not simply the theoretical, but also the real mobility at all times of every member of the body, which is impossible unless local entanglements shall be avoided, and local attachments shall not be permitted to gain such force and persistency as would naturally grow out of long and indefinite continuance among the same associations. Whenever a "traveling" minister becomes practically local, he necessarily acts as a clog and a cause of friction in the working of the system.

2. The plea sometimes heard that any specific limitation is unreasonable, because of the various conditions in different cases, which make any such limitation arbitrary and injurious, and that it would be better to determine each case upon its own merits, is much more specious than solid. It assumes that the number of cases in which an extension of the pastoral term beyond three years is desirable are sufficiently numerous to require some relief, which also could be given without any peril to the system. Both of which assumptions may be called in question. In respect to the first, it is not granted that there is among the churches any considerable dissatisfaction with the three-years limitation. It is believed, on the contrary, that the extension (made in 1864) of the term from two to three years was made not in conformity to the wishes of the churches, but, rather, in opposition to them. It is believed by not a few, and not without good grounds, that, could the unconstrained voice of the Church be heard to-day, it would favor a return to the two-years limitation, rather than any further extension. But an administrative expediency is not to be determined simply by people's wishes. The interests of the case in hand should also be considered, and, indeed, made to govern. It may be doubted whether there are many cases occurring in our church work—enough, indeed, to require any practicable consideration—in which the closing of a pastorate at the end of three years is not, in the whole, desirable. There may be exceptions; but they are too few to be made any account of. Methodism is not designed especially to build up great metropolitan

churches, in which certain individual ministers shall win renown; but, rather, to operate diffusively, and to build up its interests among whole communities. It may be doubted whether the highest efficiency in this its chief work would be promoted by the existence of such great semi-isolated churches, with their ministers, who, though still members of the itinerancy, would necessarily become more or less separated from the ordinary rank and file of their associates. The proposed removal of the three-years limitation does not seem to be called for either by the voice of the churches nor yet by the requirements of the work itself; but, rather, the contrary in both cases.

But there are decided and positive objections to protracted pastorates, as not in harmony with the genius of Methodism. Even the early or frequent return of a minister to a former charge is a matter of doubtful expediency. Connectional uniformity is especially desirable, and this is maintained by everywhere placing the general before the particular: the whole denomination before the individual minister and the particular church. Most men of positive characters have their peculiarities, and if such a one remain long with the same people he will fashion their minds and thoughts after his own individuality, rather than after the general spirit and genius of Methodism; and, although that may possibly be, in itself, as good as this, it is not so good for Methodism, nor does it tend to the unity and harmony of the whole body. Methodist itinerancy is designed to promote a thorough and all-pervading denominationalism; a uniformity of life and experience, of forms and methods, of conceptions and language, which requires on the part of the ministers that they shall be conversant with the Church in a variety of localities, and on the part of the local churches that they shall be served by a variety of ministers of such broad and varied observations. And these requirements can be met only by a not infrequent change of pastors.

3. It may be doubted whether, without a legal limitation of the pastoral term, it would be possible to maintain the itinerancy at all, beyond allowing what is now the appointing power to act as an intelligence agency, to find places for unemployed ministers, and ministers for churches that fall (usually through poverty or parsimony) to supply themselves. It may seem very plausible to talk of submitting the whole matter each year to the bishop, that he may remove whomsoever he believes should be removed, and leave all others where they are, without any arbitrary time limitation. But this would be entirely impracticable. There never was a bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church that was equal to such a work. Asbury, with all his unequaled power, enforced by his iron will, while as yet the great body of the preachers were comparatively children and all the traditions of the Church were in favor of a strong government, found himself unequal to the work of regulating the appointments at his own discretion, and, therefore, asked for a law of limitation upon the pastoral term, behind which he might escape from otherwise insuperable obstacles in the way of his duties. Wesley himself found it necessary to temporize somewhat during his later years, and to permit his brother and some others to select and retain their own places; but, in arranging for the governing of the connnection after his death, he provided by law that no minister should remain in the same work more than three years. By their faithful adherence to that rule the Wesleyans of Great Britain have made their system at once the most thorough and the most effective in all of universal Methodism. And, if such peerless autocrats as Wesley and Asbury found themselves unequal to the work of maintaining the itinerancy except by a law of limitation, how can it be expected that the bishops of the present and futurc, who necessarily lack both the personal and the official prestige of their great predecessors, shall do better than they? Nor is this all. Both the ministers and the churches of the present time are vastly more powerful than they were even down to the middle of the present century, and every year adds to their personal and associate influence. The influence of the Episcopacy as a merely official power is all the time relatively declining, and must continue to do so long as both the ministry and the laity of the Church continue to rise in the social and intellectual scale. The Episcopacy will, therefore, more and more need to be sustained by clear and express definitions of their functions, so that they may administer under the direct guidance of law, and be saved from too much leeway of discretion, which would be pretty sure to be

denounced by those whom it aggrieved as caprice or corrupt favor.

Any attempt to legislate for special cases of exception to the time limit will be found to be beset with interminable difficulties. The proposition to make appointments beyond three years conditional on the recommendation of the annual conference in each case will be found objectionable, for a variety of reasons. It constitutes the conference in such cases a co-ordinate power with the bishop, to which some might not object if it were done directly and uniformly, who would, however, decidedly object to any such a partial proceeding. It would compel men to interfere in cases over which they have no general authority, and in a way that might seem especially odious to those whose wishes they might thwart. If a given church should desire to retain their pastor beyond three years, and he should desire to remain, it would scarcely be in human nature to refuse consent, although it were generally believed that the whole thing ought not to be.

Sometimes it is said: If the church desire to retain their pastor, and he is willing to remain with them, may not the bishop be allowed to grant their request, if he too thinks well of the arrangement? To this question we have already answered in part; but there is yet another view of the case that deserves attention. The law of limitation has often been praised, by those not subject to it, as facilitating changes of pastorates where such changes are felt to be desirable. An undesirable minister can be endured with quiet patience when it is known that a change must come before long; and a minister will readily give up a place that he otherwise would hold on to if assured that his removal will bring no discredit nor throw him out of the work. But if all the eligible places are occupied by those who are unwilling to quit them—and that would be the case—then must the minister make sure of what he has. He must conciliate all classes and all influences in the church and congregation; must "become all things to all men"; must "soften his speech and smooth his tongue," so as to make his calling sure for the next year, and so year by year forever. But, if he is at all able and adroit in his work, he need not very much fear, for he will naturally bring his own friends to the front and force his opponents to the background, till, discouraged by the state of things, these will gradually drop out of the church, to be succeeded by those who like the minister. And so, from year to year, the minister will be asked for, because the official board are his partisans and creatures; and what thus occurs in one church will also occur in any other that could be desired by a minister of sufficient tact to hold possession of what he has, and so the itiuerancy would practically come to a stand-still so far as the eligible churches and the desirable ministers are concerned. Whether or not it is worth preserving is not now the question before us; but to us nothing seems plainer than that, *without a legally enforced system of removals, at not remote intervals, the itinerancy would not last out the life-time of the present generation of ministers.*

We have already shown what the Itinerancy is, and also pointed out some of the conditions necessary to its successful operation and perpetuity. The question of its value and whether it is worth preserving, purposely held in abeyance, now requires our attention, and to its discussion we propose to devote the present paper.

And, first of all and somewhat generally, it may be assumed that, since it is highly desirable that Methodism shall remain and hold its place among the religious forces of the country, so the itinerancy, without which it was shown that it could not subsist, should be cherished and saved from harm. Of the two points assumed in the foregoing sentence, that which asserts the desirableness of the continued life of Methodism must be passed over with but few words; of the other we may speak more at length. We believe that no right-minded Evangelical Christian will hesitate to grant that the disintegration and organic extinction of American Methodism would be a calamity, by which the aggregate Christianity of the country would suffer, and, therefore, that they who in the order of Providence are charged with its care and keeping are sacredly bound to protect it from unnecessary peril. We not only claim for it the right to be; but we also look upon it as a sacred trust committed by God to those who have the charge of its affairs, to be conserved and perpetuated for good of the present and coming generations of Christian peoples, and also, believing that the life of Methodism as an ecclesiastical organism is implicated with

its itinerancy, we claim for that the same diligent and devout care and protection.

The character of a Methodist as drawn by John Wesley is quite apart from all matters of ecclesiasticism, and, according to that description, we rejoice in believing that there are multitudes of genuine Methodists that are wholly disconnected with organic Methodism; and so, were our whole Methodist organism dissolved and swept out of being, there would still be great numbers of the spiritual Methodists of whom Wesley wrote. And if, for any cause, the ligaments that hold the body of Methodist ministers and churches and members together as a Christian commonwealth were destroyed, these dissevered parts would still be Christian ministers and churches and members; but not, as now, ecclesiastically Methodists. The churches so segregated would, first of all, become independent, and then they might modify their independency by forming associations, or by uniting together in presbytcries and synods; but, being Arminian in doctrine, with an almost universally dominant indisposition to accept the peculiarities of Calvinism, there would grow out of the *débris* of the ruined temple of organic Methodism an Anti-Calvinistic Congregationalism and Presbyterianism all through the land, thus still further complicating the divisions of our Evangelical Protestantism. Certainly it would be better that Methodism, as now organized and engaged in its evangelical propagandism, should continue as it is and still go forward with its work.

American Methodism is a conspicuous fact in the religious and ecclesiastical affairs of the country, which points with devout praise to its records, in justification of its right to be and as a pledge of its future usefulness. But, whatever it is or has done more than others, it owes to its peculiar organization and methods—that is, to the itinerancy. The Methodism of the eighteenth century in Great Britain was not wholly, nor, indeed, perhaps chiefly, Wesleyan; but the Wesleyan part of it became organized as an itinerancy, and so perpetuated its life and power. Whitefield had kindled the flames of the great awakening in this country long years before Wesleyan Methodism was known on this side of the Atlantic; but the influence of Whitefield's labors have ceased to be recognized, while Wesleyanism has overspread the whole country. The spiritual religion propagated by Whitefield was as true and as intense as anything taught by the Wesleyan preachers, and the different degrees of effectiveness of the two must be sought, not in any spiritual superiority of the one over the other, but in the differences of their methods and their organisms. Calvinistic Methodism, as preached by Whitefield, as soon as his voice was silenced ceased to be recognized, and was lost like water spilt upon the ground; while Wesleyan Methodism, though later planted, has grown into a great harvest and now fills the whole land, and this difference is due to the fact that, while the former remained only a voice crying in the wilderness, the latter became an organized army of invasion and occupation, going forth to conquer the whole land for Christ. The exceptional success of Methodism as an evangelizing agency in America, of which nobody can fail to take knowledge, is simply the result of the peculiar form of its organization and its methods of action. If it is claimed that its agents were inspired with a wonderful zeal for their work, even that was, no doubt, itself an effect of their methods of action and of the influences growing out of combined Christian devotion. Whatever Methodism is to-day she owes, more than to anything else, to her form of ecclesiastical organization, of which the itinerancy is at once the animating and directing spirit.

A peculiarly interesting fact in Methodist economy, though very little is ever said about it, is its successful utilization of its forces. A minister unemployed is a laborer standing idle all the day and producing nothing, and a church without a pastor is a field lying fallow and going to waste; and, beyond any other possible method of ministerial supply, the itinerancy guards against both of these evils. By the fundamental law of the system, every member of the organism must be supplied with "work"; while, on the other hand, every church or society must have its duly-appointed ministers. Of the ten or twelve thousand traveling ministers of the Methodist Episcopal Church, all that were found in a condition to accept employment at the last session of their several conferences have their appropriate fields assigned them, so that there is not on their part any waste of precious time and strength; and every church, however small or poor, is provided with a pastor, whose duty it is to nurture and

care for it. The economy of this proceeding is evident, and it will appear remarkable and practically valuable in proportion as it is considered and compared with the wastes necessarily incident to any other method of ministerial supply. Probably no other point in all of Methodistic practice has contributed more effectively to its exceptional success in the world. Here, if nowhere else in the system, is the saying that "they are all at it and always at it" fully realized, and the results correspond with the practice.

In our former article we spoke of the change of ministers from place to place as necessary to the perpetuation of the system, so that it should be continued, though at some disadvantage. But we by no means grant that such changes are, on the whole, disadvantageous; but, on the contrary, claim that they are productive of much good. Permanency in the pastoral relation may have its advantages. It also, in not a few cases, has its very decided disadvantages; and, not infrequently, a change of ministers may cure the worst kind of church divisions, even when the removed pastor is quite blameless. Some ministers may do their best work by continuing for a long time in the same place; but many more will find their effectiveness increased by occasional and not very infrequent changes. Newness is often an element of power, especially for arresting attention and making lively impressions; and many an able minister, who has come to appear commonplace to his hearers, would prove himself to be a power and an inspiration in some other place. The interest awakened among the hearers by a new voice in the pulpit is duplicated by the sight of a new congregation looking up expectantly into the face of the preacher. So, when the end of a three-years term has been reached, though all parties are more than satisfied with what has been, there may be and often are good and sufficient reasons why a change then be made. Monotony is itself such a dangerous evil in church life that it may be wise to interrupt it, though at the expense of some present disadvantages. Changes of pastoral relations are unavoidable, and are matters of frequent occurrence among churches and ministers of all denominations; and if by any means this contingency may be anticipated and provided for, so as to avoid the evils incident to violent disruptions, such a measure would be most desirable, and precisely this thing is done by the Methodist itinerancy. The term of actual service is often allowed to run on because the time for a change by a regular process is at hand, when otherwise a more speedy change would be demanded; and perhaps at length the minister departs with the benedictions of his people, who otherwise would have gone forth with other than words of blessing. And, under the action of the itinerancy, change is not the loss of a position to the minister, as in other systems, nor is the church from which its pastor is taken left unsupplied for an indefinite period, while searching for a new minister; for the same word which displaces one installs another. When the pastoral relation is permanent, churches are naturally unwilling to call elderly men to that position, for, though they may now be rich in all ministerial capabilities, yet a few years will necessarily disqualify them for their work and compel a change among unpleasant circumstances; but under the itinerancy, where appointments are only for a single year and cannot be repeated beyond three years, this difficulty is entirely obviated, and churches can safely accept the valuable services of ripe experience without incurring the risk of being burdened with decrepitude and senility.

A system of ministerial services which gives to the pastor only a yearly lease, with but one or two possible renewals, makes it necessary for him, in entering upon his work, to lose no time before engaging actively to do something that shall be appreciable. Quick results in such a case are the only possible ones, if a man would see the fruits of his labor; and it is by such efforts that the work of saving souls must be done. The Christian ministry must steadily and earnestly seek to be aggressive; and for this the itinerancy affords, beyond any other system, both the motives and the means.

The relations of a Methodist minister to his own special charge and the peculiarities of his position generally contribute very largely to his freedom of thought and action. The settled pastor—however able, and naturally above servility, he may be—in a real and effective sense belongs to the church that he serves, and he must be either more or less than a man not to be affected by his situation. He desires the peace of the church, the har-

monious co-operation of its parts (or parties), and his own agreeable relations with all: to secure all of which may incline him to submit to restraints, and dictations, and the tyrannies of circumstances, by which both his manhood and his Christian and ministerial freedom may be invaded. Such things are, indeed, among the unavoidable infelicities of the pastoral relation; but they are less felt by an itinerant than a settled minister. His belongings are not to this or that particular church, but to the whole body; and, if pressed too severely in any case, he knows that it is safe to resist, and his people know it too, and the resultant influence is strongly in favor of ministerial independence and manliness of thought and action, the lack of which, it cannot be denied, is among the chief defects in the average ministerial character.

The itinerant minister that appreciates his position receives from it an inspiration and enlargement of thoughts and feelings somewhat corresponding to the greatness of the system of which he forms a part. He instinctively claims an inheritance in its achievements and history; a possessory right in all that it is and an heirship to the reversionary greatness of its future. If his soul is in harmony with the soul of Methodism, he finds his highest freedom in bearing its "yoke" and feels himself to be dignified and ennobled by his position; and, since the recognized design of the Methodist itinerancy is evangelical propagandism he is impelled by the sense of what he is to engage actively in that work. In this, more than in any other single condition, may be found the secret of the success of Methodism, and this would be impossible but for the itinerancy.

These are only a part of the advantages that are secured by an itinerancy, which are not available to any others; and yet these would seem to be sufficient to justify the demand for its maintenance in perpetuity. Quite possibly these are not always utilized according to their possibilities; but the practical workings of the system justify the claims of its advocates. Evangelical Christianity in America cannot afford to lose the Methodist itinerancy.

A SOUTHERN METHODIST VIEW OF THE ITINERANCY.

BY THE REV. THOMAS O. SUMMERS, D.D., LL.D.

THERE seems to be a general desire to have a free, thorough, and amicable discussion of the subject of the Methodist itinerancy. All the Methodist Connections in the world are concerned in it; but "the two Episcopal Methodisms"—the Northern and Southern branches of the M. E. Church—evince the greatest interest in it. The time is propitious for the discussion. The Northern General Conference is approaching, and modifications of the existing system are desired by some and deprecated by others. The Southern Connection is at peace; yet there are not a few among us who would like to see some changes, additional to those already made, brought about, without strife or disturbing agitation, just as lay representation was introduced, the result of which may not have fully realized the hopes of the prime movers in the innovation, as it has not realized the fears of those who opposed it. It is one of the best signs of the times that questions of this sort can be thoroughly discussed without engendering any bitterness or superinducing any schism.

I have heard and read a great deal on this subject. I am pretty well versed in the controversies which resulted in the organization of the Methodist Protestant Church and the Wesleyan Connection in the North. I was secretary of the convention which organized the M. E. Church, South, and I have been secretary of all its General Conferences, and its general editor from the beginning, as well as editor of *Advocates, Quarterly Review*, etc. The question, therefore, in all its aspects has been forced on my consideration, and I have never been averse "to show mine opinion." I have conversed largely with the fathers of the Church, as well as with men now living (including many wise men of other denominations) on the subject. I have no personal, sectarian, or sectional interest to serve, no ax to grind, no pet opinion to nurse—unless, indeed, my unwavering attachment to the itinerancy, including the general superintendency and presiding eldership, may be so considered.

It is important that we should understand what is meant by Methodist Itinerancy; how it is defined; what are its differentia. By Methodist itinerancy we understand a pastorate constituted of ministers, who have the care of one or more congregations, and who are subject to periodical and occasional changes, according to a regular and well-defined system of alternation.

It is a remarkable fact that many writers, in treating this subject, leave the part of Hamlet out of the play of "Hamlet." That which is essential—the grand peculiarity of the system—is put into the background or entirely ignored; while that which is incidental is put into the foreground, as if (not to press the illustration) we should define the motion of a planet as a diurnal revolution on its own axis, omitting its annual revolution around the sidereal center.

The Methodist system of itinerancy is *sui generis*. It is lost time to look for precedents and parallels for it. It may be well to note the objections to it and the arguments for it, and to inquire if by any means it may be made more efficient.

1. It is alleged that it robs a minister of his independence. It makes him the mere janizary of the bishop. Like a Romish priest he must obey his master, serve his interests. The bishop obeys the pope, and the priests obey the bishop, who might say, with the centurion in the Gospel: "I am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers; and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it" (Luke vii, 8).

It is conceded that a general superintendency with an itinerant pastorate does impinge on a man's independence. But if there be any position in society, civil or ecclesiastical, which does not do this, we know not where to find it.

> "Order is Heaven's first law; and, this confessed,
> Some are, and must be, greater than the rest."

This may be, this has been abused to purposes of clerical ambition and oppression;

but it is wiser to recognize the principle and guard it than to ignore it.

But the analogy between Methodist preachers and Romish priests does not hold. The former are well protected by constitutional provisions. They choose their own "masters," and for just reasons can depose them. They can modify their economy when they please, as there is no infallible pope, with supreme power, to restrict their liberty. In a word, they have all the independence they wish. The responsibility involved they are glad to share with their brethren, and they mutually agree to devolve a certain amount of it upon such of them as they think best qualified to bear it.

2. But it is objected that our system deprives the people of their independence. Here again the parallel is attempted to be drawn between Methodists and Romanists. This, indeed, is not done as much now as formerly. The absurdity is too apparent. From the beginning, the people have gladly adopted the itinerant system — being willing to surrender the right of calling their pastors, while the latter surrender the right of choosing their parishes. They know that, on the whole, they are served better by this arrangement than they could be by any other. Occasionally ill-advised men have induced some of them to imagine they were serfs (*adscripti*), subject to their lords, etc.; and they have asserted their manhood by leaving the Connection, forming independent bodies, or joining other communions. By the observation of half a century I have noted what they have gained on the score of independence, and it has not hastened my return to the independent system in which I was trained. It may be safely said that the great body of Methodists feel no oppression and never think of having sacrificed any independence worth retaining. There are no people who have a more liberal, manly, and independent spirit than "the people called Methodists." Their fundamental principles, both of doctrine and discipline, and also their traditions, engender this spirit.

3. But it is urged that it deters many from becoming Methodists.

That is true. I have known many who approved our doctrines, and wished to enjoy our "means of grace," who were deterred by this feature of our economy. Many have said to me: "We would join your Church and attend your ministry if you would remain among us; but—" It is needless to repeat their reasons. At the end of my first two years in the ministry—in Augusta circuit, Baltimore Conference, in the Valley of Virginia—I made farewell visits to those who had attended my ministry. The pastor of a large Presbyterian church had been removed, and many of his people worshiped with us, without changing their church relations. One of them, a ruling elder, on my taking leave of him, said, with some warmth: "We do not like your system. We have become acquainted with you and are attached to you. Now you are going to leave us and we shall see you no more. We do not like your system!" I replied: "We do. If you lose me, you will probably get a better man." "Better or not," he replied, "he will be a stranger, and we shall have to make his acquaintance," etc. "But," he added, "we do not like our own system. We do not like to have a man saddled on us for life. He wears out after awhile." I replied: "You are hard to please. What would you have?" He said: "Let a minister remain with the same people as long as seven years, if both parties are pleased. Then let him be removed." I stated the objection that this might create invidious distinctions—one-year, two-year, seven-year preachers. The "best" stations would keep the "best" men, and what would become of the rest? He simply replied that, say and do as we might, the *best* stations would have the *best* men, and the fact might as well be recognized. There is no help for it.

4. A kindred objection is frequently urged that the itinerancy rudely rends the tenderest ties.

To this I reply, first, by concession. Omitting the epithet "rudely," the allegation is true. The Romanists allow of the "translation of bishops" from one see to another. Similar removals take place in the Anglican and other communions. The inferior ministers are constantly changing. We are not the only people among whom such ties are rent. It is not too much to say that they are more "rudely" rent among others than among us. It is done among us without blame or disgrace or humiliation. It takes place normally, quietly—as nearly as possible without friction. The pain of parting gradually subsides; other associations are formed; and, by a gracious and well-known law, the plasticity of our nature softens to us the asperities of

this, as well as of every other of our earthly trials. An ill-natured opponent speaks of our system as "unnatural." Perhaps he has had experience of something more "unnatural" in the workings of his own system.

5. Another kindred objection is sometimes brought against the itinerancy. It makes a pastor and his family indifferent to their parishioners, and they to them.

To some extent this may be the case. Perhaps it is well that it should be so. It is well for a minister to keep from close and varied social entanglements. He should not be too comfortably situated. Nothing should divert him from his one business—*saving souls.* But those who bring this objection to our system do it from abstract considerations; they do not understand its practical workings. Accompany the preacher from Conference to his parish; see how kindly he is welcomed, the provisions usually made for the "new departure," the readiness with which new associations are formed, the spirit with which he enters on his charge, the immediate results for which he labors, the co-operation of the official members, who usually take pains (no, pleasure) in introducing him to the people. Then go with him through the year; witness his effort to maintain the *status* of the station or circuit, to improve its spiritual and temporal character, to make a good report at conference, as he wishes to stand well with his associates in the ministry, who are doing the like in their respective charges, as well as to act ever as in his "great Taskmaster's eye." Then bear in mind that the people are accustomed to these changes—they are normal to them. They accommodate themselves to them. In many instances they like them. The kind officiousness which they superinduce is congenial to many persons, especially to women, who compose the larger part of our congregations. Bear all this in mind, and the objection in question loses nearly all its force.

6. It precludes social influence.

A settled minister, if he is a man of eminent parts, does, indeed, acquire a *prestige*, which may be turned to good account and give him and his church some advantage over others. But, from long and close observation, I am constrained to say that a good deal may be said *per contra*. Many a settled minister is shunned, rather than sought. He is worn out. A new man is preferred. And then how many *settled* ministers become *unsettled* in a short time! So that this consideration drops into insignificance.

7. But they say it is expensive.

It does incur expense. The expense incurred in traveling from one circuit or station to another is not, indeed, very great in these days of rapid and easy transportation. But it does sometimes bear hard on ministers. No matter what provision is made for them in regard to parsonages, heavy furniture, and the like, ministers have to provide a great many things besides what the stewards furnish—horses, cows, gardens, various household articles, and the like—which are frequently sacrificed by forced sales or injured by transportation. These things are not always borne in mind in the estimation for salaries. But, no matter who defrays the expense, it has to be defrayed. But when a *settled* minister removes, which he frequently does, the same thing takes place. Methodist ministers are not the only persons who "have no certain dwelling-place."

But, after all, the expense, whoever bears it, is nothing compared with the good which is thus accomplished; and many a Methodist preacher would have had to undergo as great inconveniences, at as much cost, if he had never entered the itinerancy. The point in question is hardly worth noting, except that it somewhat strengthens the plea for less frequent removals. Other things being equal, this should be cast into the scale in favor of a longer pastoral term.

7. But it is objected that the itinerancy caters to an unhealthy desire for novelty.

Perhaps it does, to some extent. Those, however, who are influenced by such a consideration would take little interest in church matters but for this provision, so that the tables may be fairly turned in regard to this objection.

8. A more serious objection is sometimes urged that it superinduces intellectual indolence.

A lazy man can go from circuit to circuit, and preach the same sermon at every appointment for forty years in succession. He may, indeed, repeat his sermons with improvement, as Whitefield did; and the people would not be losers, but gainers, by it. This, however, is not always the case. Dr. Olin deprecates those plans of sermons, or *skeletons* (that is the better word), which

have grown yellow and dingy by long and frequent use. It is too great a surgical feat for some men to put muscles and nerves, arteries and veins, on such dry bones and make them live. They are sometimes *very few* and *very dry*. Such ghastly anatomies are, indeed, extremely repulsive. But there is a remedy for this. Such preachers make themselves "unacceptable to the people," and then they may be "located without their own consent." The working bees kill the drones and cast them out of the hive.

9. A more plausible objection is urged by the opponents of itinerancy: it lacks precedent.

It does, indeed, lack precedent. This we have admitted. But is that a valid objection? No one will aver that Methodist itineraney is interdicted in the New Testament; and he must be bold, indeed, who will maintain that it is inconsistent with any principles therein contained. It is admitted that bishops, elders, pastors, of the Acts and the Epistles, appear to have been settled in their ministry. But there is no injunction in the premises, *pro* or *con*. For all that appears to the contrary, elders were allowed to remain settled, using their spiritual gifts as occasion served; but, if any of them were needed in other places, the apostles had the power to detail them, as the apostles constituted the bond of union of the catholic Church in all the world.

As far as we can discover, there is no *single pastorate*, in the New Testament. But it is a rare thing to find any other kind—any collegiate ministry, in any Church among us, Episcopal, Presbyterian, or Congregational. Prate no more about precept or precedent.

Having frankly stated the objections to Methodist itineraney, let us now notice the advantages of this system.

1. It secures to every preacher a parish, and to every parish a preacher.

One of the greatest evils of the *settled* system is that it leaves so many ministers without pastoral charges and so many parishes without pastors. It is thus in Protestant Episcopal, Presbyterian, Congregational, and Baptist Churches. In this country it is ascertained that about one-fourth of the number are in that condition. This is a lamentable thing. It does not obtain in the Methodist Episcopal churches. Some of the charges are not very desirable; but they all furnish a minister with work, and they all pay him something for the work he performs. Some of the ministers are not accomplished men; but they are all approved by lay and clerical courts and the poorest of them are better than none. This is a great recommendation of the itineraney. It is not a bare theory. It is a living fact, a blessed reality, which always makes our hearts rejoice.

2. It secures changes with the least friction.

What difficulties, and annoyances, and animosities are frequently connected with resignations and calls among our brethren who have *a settled* ministry! The irony in the expression I cannot help; but I mean no offense. I know the workings of their system. I have been behind the scenes. I betray no confidence. One of the most revolting things I know is a minister going around from church to church preaching "trial" sermons; acting as "a supply," *locum tenens*; battleised by incompetent persons; subjected to impertinent questions; *black-balled*; or, if *called*, respond ing with the knowledge that a respectable minority opposed the call.

If the pastor has been forced to resign the place he had filled, and make a bargain with one of inferior pretensions and smaller pay, it requires more grace than even ministers may possess to submit to the hard fate without a sense of degradation and chagrin. If he dissolves his connection with a parish to become pastor of one of higher pretensions and better pay, he may possibly question his own motives; others will *kindly* question them, insinuating that he would not have so readily heard a call for a lower salary, and the like. Who has not heard such insinuations? But the itinerant preacher is saved all this trouble, annoyanec, and vexation. The change is made for him in the easiest possible manner, and when he goes to his new charge, if there are any opposed to him, he knows it not and may never know it. I speak from experience and close observation. This is a great advantage. It counterbalances all the drawbacks.

3. It gives novelty.

Those who affect to despise this element of pleasure and profit are not to be regarded. Wesley had great intellectual and homiletical resources; yet he said he should preach himself and his people as dead as a stone if he preached to one congregation constantly for a twelvemonth. He may

have been mistaken in this extreme statement; but he was not mistaken in the principle. How many settled ministers to-day are dead as a stone! They may not know it; but it is difficult to see how they can be ignorant of it. Their people know it; or, if they do not, it is all the worse for them, as they have not vitality enough to feel the pressure of the burden which is on them.

Among us, the people who are not pleased or profited by their minister have the satisfaction of knowing that the burden is not "saddled on them for life." So the minister. He may be tired of his charge; tired of the dull round. He wants a change. He needs novelty, as well as the people. He will get it by and by. And this enables him to labor on with patience, if not with joy.

4. It furnishes variety.

This no one man can do as it ought to be done. A congregation needs many-sided teaching—truth in different forms, different modes of illustration and presentation. Even variety in physique, voice, gesture, address, as well as topics, language, learning, pastoral talent and tact, is of importance. If mere existence be called life, a man may "live by bread alone"; but for the full development and preservation of his physical system he needs a variety of animal and vegetable food and condiments. The pastor who is not aware of this, but who thinks himself adequate to all the demands of the pastorate, is to be pitied: that is all. No; that is not all. He ought to be waked out of his soothing dream, that he might not let his people famish and faint for want of "food convenient" for them—the variety of *pabulum* which no one caterer can supply.

5. It economizes homiletical work.

As we have seen, it may incidentally superinduce indolence; but it greatly economizes pulpit preparations. My late lamented friend, the Rev. George G. Cookman, used to say: The Methodist itinerancy does a rousing business with a small capital! Indeed, it does. The Methodists ought to take the world, with their glorious doctrine of a free, and full, and present, and conscious salvation; with the opportunity of preaching the same sermon, improving and adapting it to many congregations on a circuit, then, within a reasonable time, running to another circuit and there repeating the process.

6. The itinerancy secures more time for pastoral work.

This is an obvious corollary from the foregoing. It is objected to itinerant ministers that they cannot perform as much pastoral work as settled ministers, because they are incessantly employed in preaching. The objectors lose sight of the fact just noted. While the settled minister is wearing himself out in efforts to furnish fresh food for his congregation, the itinerant avails himself of old stores and takes that time to visit his flock; and in his visitations he gathers fresh material for his sermons, making them more practical in their bearing and more pertinent in their application to "the living present."

7. The itinerancy contributes to the independence of the pulpit.

A venerable minister of the Presbyterian Church used to say to me: "The only independent pulpit in the land is the Methodist." The free salvation which the Methodist preacher preaches may have something to do with this; but the Methodist preacher, coming at no one's call and going at no one's bidding, changing at the end of a few years, perhaps at the end of one year—the Doctor thought he must be happy in his independence, and so he is.

8. The itinerancy promotes sympathy among both pastors and people.

All the former, including bishops and presiding elders—as all are itinerant—feel that they belong to one guild, "true yokefellows," operating in a common interest, laboring and entering into one another's labors. It is a joint-stock company.

So it is, in a less degree, perhaps, with the membership of the Church. The connectional idea is simply grand. The concentric circles in which we all move, carried round by "the great iron wheel" of the itinerancy ("I thank thee, Jew, for that word!"), makes us feel that we are revolving around one center, like the planets and asteroids of our solar system.

9. It fosters and develops the aggressive and heroic spirit of the apostolic and martyr Church.

The trials inherent in the system, which we do not disguise, harden and toughen those who enter fully into it. The very sight of such men is inspiring. There is scarcely any scene more impressive than the close of an Annual Conference. A hundred or two hundred men sitting in solemn silence, their fate for one year depend

ing on a ball of paper in the hands of one man, and thousands of people who are not present awaiting the result with the deepest interest, all mutually pledged to abide by the "Appointments," whatever they may be.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. It is found in the answer to two questions.

1. Ought the Methodist itinerancy to be substituted by a settled ministry?

I answer: Never! Not, at least, till the Millennium comes. Methodist ministers must run to and fro, like missionaries, as Wesley expresses it. Indeed, Methodism is a grand missionary system; and the regular pastorate ought so to partake of the missionary, aggressive spirit as to go over into any Macedonia which may call for help, without the least hesitancy, the world being its parish.

So far as itineraney within a pastoral charge is concerned, it is getting to be in high favor among all denominations. They may not follow in our *ruts;* they may not adopt all our methods; but many of their ministers do itinerate within their pastoral sphere. A venerable Presbyterian minister remarked to me, years ago, in Texas: "I have organized a circuit in the country—no, not a circuit! I will not copy the Methodists so closely as that!" He was a pleasant old Scotchman, somewhat facetious. Bless his memory! "But," said he, "I have three appointments—arranged not like a circle, but a triangle; and I am going to serve them." Such *triangular* charges, and charges of other shapes and various sizes, are multiplying among all the churches.

2 What modifications of the Methodist itineraney are called for by the times in which we live?

There are three responses to this question.

(1.) Many, perhaps a majority, wish no change. They would let well enough alone. They want the temporal limitation of the pastorate to remain as it was fixed by the last changes—three years in the British and Northern Connections and four years in the Southern Connection.

(2.) Some, perhaps not a great many, comparatively speaking, would restore the term of temporal limitation fixed by the General Conference of 1804—four years for presiding elders and two years for pastors; the term being shortened at the will of the bishop, but not prolonged. Some ten or twelve years ago this seemed to find more favor than at present. The apprehensions of evil to result from extending the term have not been fulfilled; though, on the other hand, all the anticipated advantages of those who favored the extension may not have been realized. The practical working of our theories seldom meets our expectations. But I have heard no one of late express a desire to return to the limitation of 1804.

(3.) Others, perhaps a majority, favor the return to the original plan—"old Methodism." Previous to 1804 there was no specified temporal limitation; that is, there was no term of pastoral service fixed by statute, as it was in 1804 and as it has been since. In 1775, however, it was ordered that "the general assistant, Thomas Rankin, is to travel till the month of December, and then take a quarter in New York. The preachers in New Jersey to change in one quarter. Webster and Cooper to change with Gatch and Watters at the end of six months. The preachers in Brunswick and Hanover to change as the assistant thinks proper." In the Minutes of 1794 there is this note: "N. B.—The Bishop and Conference desire that the preachers would generally change every six months, by the order of the presiding elder, wherever it can be made convenient." In the British Connection instructions are given annually for similar changes, though they are not numerous.

In a volume now before me it is stated that the M. E. Church, South, has removed the temporal limitation. The error was perhaps occasioned by the fact that at the General Conference of 1866 the subject was fully and ably discussed, and this measure was voted for by a majority; but it was reconsidered. I remember distinctly that during the discussion I asked the bishops, Bishop Pierce being in the chair, if *they* would be embarrassed by the removal of the restriction. The presiding bishop said emphatically it would embarrass them. I had favored the removal; but urged it not, in view of this declaration.

In conversing lately with one of our foremost men, who has traveled largely through the Connection and who is deeply interested in the subject, he assured me that the removal of the restriction is advocated by increasing numbers. He thinks it is only a question of time, and not a far-distant time. A very shrewd, observing layman, who was a delegate in the last

General Conference, entertains a different opinion. He deprecates the removal of the restriction, supposing it would result in a settled ministry. The advocates of the measure think otherwise. The ministry was never more itinerant and less inclined to settle than when this *régime* obtained.

It is argued that bishops these days have not the backbone of Asbury and his associates. They would be overborne by clamorous preachers and their wives, and by official boards, committees, etc. All the "good" preachers would be held fast at the center, and all the "poor" preachers would be thrown off to the periphery of "the iron wheel"; and then what would the itinerancy be worth? Not much.

On the other side, it is argued that Bishop P. may not have justly represented the sentiment of all his colleagues; but, if he did, they had acted so long under the limitation that they naturally shrunk from any change. But some of them have gone to their reward, and those of them who remain, if they live till the next General Conference (1882), will have completed their threescore years and ten or fourscore years, and they will soon rest from their labors. Those who have been consecrated since may not apprehend any embarrassment on the removal of the restriction, and those who will be called to occupy the places in the college of bishops made vacant by death would be chosen with special reference to the additional responsibility. Our bishops have never failed in meeting all their obligations, and the General Conference may be trusted in the selection of good heart of oak, not sap, as the timber out of which Methodist bishops are to be made.

It is contended, too, that the enlargement of districts; the magnifying of the presiding elder's office; the development of the connectional principle, which is growing among us and is one of the best signs of the times; the facility with which bishops and presiding elders can move about through the districts and through the conferences, will make it easy for them to know all the wants of the preachers and the people and to make provision for them.

That there may be some who wish the restriction removed, to secure a *quasi* settled pastorate, may be the case; but I have heard of none who entertain this sentiment.

Southern Methodist preachers and people are strong in their attachment to the itinerancy, and they would rather have an annual change all through the connection than the stagnation of a settled pastorate.

If the restoration of the original prerogative of the episcopacy would tend to strengthen and develop and perpetuate the itinerancy, as the advocates of the measure affirm, then let it be restored. If otherwise, let things remain as they are.

An eminent minister recently suggested to me that, if a preacher who otherwise, on account of health or peculiar circumstances, would be driven to location, were allowed to remain for an indefinite period in the same charge, and so be saved to the pastoral work, he saw no good reason why this might not be done, the people consenting thereunto. The temporal restriction might remain, and the episcopal prerogative in question be recognized by adding this to the exceptions: "And such other ministers as in his godly judgment should not be removed."

REASONS FOR MAINTAINING THE ITINERANCY UNALTERED.

BY CHANCELLOR E. O. HAVEN, D. D., LL.D.

SELDOM, indeed, have any writers received so honorable an appeal to noble motives as have we, who are invited to bring before the readers of THE INDEPENDENT a condensed discussion of a question about a part of the ecclesiastical polity of the branch of Christ's Church to which we belong. Our readers are already secured, belonging to all the great bodies of thinkers and actors in church and state. The tribunal is competent. I hope the subject is worthy, and could only wish that my part might be performed more ably. We are not chosen as gladiators, to wrestle and smite each other, for the entertainment of the public; but as men supposed to have convictions and to be able to render a reason for them. If I had any conscious sophistry, I would not bring it into such a coliseum or before such judges.

Let me, then, begin back, where my approval of the polity of an itinerant ministry has its origin. Denominationalism must exist and, at least now, ought to exist in the Church. I refer now not to varieties of creed; but of organizations and methods to lead to the christianization of the people. And yet, such a fullness of character is possible as will allow a man to be as intensely interested as he ought to be in his own denomination, and at the same time rejoice in the success of others. I look upon the great denominations as upon infantry, cavalry, and artillery—different arms of one service. As I should despise a cavalryman who, to brace up his patriotism, must ridicule an infantryman, so should I despise a Methodist who cannot defend his own without undervaluing any others engaged in Christ's work. Let it be understood, then, that when I defend the itinerant polity of Methodists I am not advocating an ideal polity for the Universal Church. There is no such universally best polity possible; at least, for the present. Neither that of the Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Quakers, nor of any other portion of Christ's Church is the best now for all places and all times, or for the whole in any considerable place or time. Others may not agree with me in this opinion; but, nevertheless, I must take it as a basis. It is my belief.

What, then, is that feature of Methodist polity which has demonstrated its right to exist, essentially unmodified? I answer: The itinerancy of the pastors. Let us examine this carefully.

The Methodist societies in all parts of the world agree to be modeled after one type and to use similar forms, having usually a common liberal creed, independent in local matters, with the same officers—to wit, trustees, stewards, class-leaders, Sunday-school superintendent, and sometimes local preachers, men who preach occasionally but are not pastors. But no one of these societies has a permanent pastor. The pastors proper of from fifty to two hundred churches in this country are associated, and constitute an Annual Conference, with also a few superannuated preachers and some young preachers on trial. These associated pastors are required to get rid of unworthy members, so that the churches may depend on the moral and, indeed, intellectual character of every member of the Conference. For this purpose, a prescribed formal annual inspection is undergone.

Each society agrees to receive any one of these men as pastor for a year, if he is appointed by the bishop, aided by a small "cabinet" of presiding elders; and each pastor agrees to spend a year where he is appointed. At the end of the year the appointments are made again, usually by another bishop, though the presiding elders usually are mostly the same. But there are these two grand and general limitations. No pastor may be appointed over one charge more than three successive years, nor more than three years out of any six. Every church must accept a new pastor at the end of three years, and cannot have any one pastor more than three years out of six.

Thus, it is evident, the lowest proportion of preachers that take new appointments in any one year would be, if all lived and

none were added, one-third; but, as some die, some retire, and some new ones enter every year, practically more than one-third and usually less than one-half of the churches receive new pastors in any and every year.

This makes the itinerancy so general and so impartial, embracing the ablest men and the strongest churches, that it is preeminently respectable; and the Methodist people have come to understand that, inasmuch as so many ministers must be changed annually, it will often be necessary, for adjustment, that some pastors should be removed who have not been at their places more than one or two years.

It may be a little disreputable for a minister to be constantly, or very frequently, changed at the end of one or two years; but there is no discredit in being changed at the end of three years. He is not, then, changed by a man, but by a constitution; just as a senator retires when his term of service expires. If there was no limitation, probably all changes would be more or less unpleasant and many discreditable.

Now, I cannot doubt that many, perhaps a majority of the readers of THE INDEPENDENT think that this is a strange custom. How arbitrary! What a waste of time and labor! How it must interfere with study, with friendships, with plans that require years for consummation!

I have no disposition to conceal any evil nor to magnify any good about this system. Passing my early life where Methodists were few, I early learned to defend it, and it may be now a habit, to be transmitted, perhaps, according to Darwin, to future generations, in the form of an instinct!

But, observe, we Methodists ask for no sympathy. Our system is an outgrowth of combined Divine Providence and human sagacity and willingness to work for Christ. The apostles were itinerant. Itinerancy existed germinally in the Early Church. There has always been the most of it in the best days of Christendom. One great denomination of the general Church, at least, should maintain it as a central idea till the world ends. Our laity like it. They do not want long pastorates and a settled ministry. I never yet saw a man whom I would have chosen as a preacher and pastor for myself and family for ten, twenty, or thirty years. I would rather have had the various gifts of from three to a dozen or twenty able men. Of course, the ideal requires that in both systems the preachers should be equally efficient. We Methodist people want a successive variety of good pastors. We Methodist preachers want a larger field to work in than any one society. We both get a more satisfactory development thereby. Of course, tastes differ and about tastes there should be no dispute. And the most of us see clearly that, if we want the benefits of an itinerancy, it must be not capricious, but regulated by law.

We are thankful that by the itinerant system all our able-bodied ministers are at work all the time, and all our churches have pastors. We lose no time in "candidating." Every able minister among us is known and appreciated by several churches; every church is known and appreciated by several ministers. Do we lose? We also gain. Last year an able man, the Rev. Ira G. Bidwell, D.D., died here in Syracuse. He had been only 20 years in the ministry, and had served seven churches, mostly far apart. Individuals in all those churches wept when he died, and several of them held memorial meetings. If any man as a settled minister during the same time accomplished more for the Master than he, I do not know his name. And yet every church wept when he left it, and was just in such a condition as to want him a year more! That is just what the ideal of our system demands. The more the pastor is beloved and the more the church needs him the more good the itinerancy does!

My memory is full of instances like that of Dr. Bidwell. Boasting is not becoming; but it is only fair to say that, judged by its fruits, the itinerant system has no fear of any candid comparison. The glorious history of Christendom in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries cannot be pictured without giving Methodism a conspicuous place in the foreground and background; and always Methodism has had a ministry whose itinerancy was required and regulated by law.

This system of itinerancy is practically universal among us. The great original bodies—the Wesleyan Methodists, of Great Britain and Ireland, and the M. E. Church and the M. E. Church, South, of the United States, the Methodist Church of Canada, the Wesleyans of Australia, all retain it unmodified. From time to time seceding bodies have left the parent bodies,

in a few instances in great relative numbers; and some of them have modified this itineraney, as some in the M. E. Church ask to have it modified now. In no one such instance has the result been such as to recommend it.

There are other advantages to the itineraney that tend to make us cling to it, in spite of fancied objections. It prevents the death of weak churches and is easily utilized in breaking up new ground. It promotes homogeneity among pastors and people.

Now the advocates of the proposed change grant the most of this, and aver that they are the friends of an itineraney; but they would have it solely without requirement or restraint and under the control of the bishops. They ask that the ministers should continue to meet in conference, be appointed annually; but that it should depend on the judgment of the presiding bishop, with the advice of the presiding elders, his cabinet, as to whether any one of them should be moved. And, if he and his successors think best, a pastor might remain in one church as long as he lived. This they call itineraney; though why there would be any more itineraney than though there were no bishops or conferences I cannot see. Especially, if the bishop happened not to favor itineraney, I think there would be less than there would be—say among the Baptists. These men seem to think that the bishops make the itineraney; or that the mere fact of having the names read off annually makes it. It is true that, if such a system as they desire could be worked, all the ministers would be occupied and all the churches be supplied, as now; but there might be less itineraney than now in the Presbyterian Church. In fact, the itineraney would be abolished or have no constitutional foundation. It would simply be a body of churches whose pastors were appointed by a bishop. I do not believe the system could possibly be maintained. I think few would submit to it. *A priori* reasoning is not satisfactory. A trial alone can test it. But, really, would it not be wise to let some of the smaller bodies test it first, rather than to imperil a system now worked by organizations of thousands of ministers and millions of members?

The strangest thing to me is that the advocates of this change say it would be a small change. "It is only a little one." It is just simply striking out two sentences of eighteen words each in the Discipline! Only that and nothing more. Look at the offensive words: "Provided he shall not allow any preacher to remain in the same station more than three years successively." "Provided also" "he shall not continue a preacher in the same appointment more than three years in six." Only thirty-six words. True enough. But one of them is a tremendous word—"not." That means all the universe except the little part specified before it. The I and the not I comprehends all that is; and the second part is much the largest, though, perhaps, to me not the most interesting. Suppose you strike the "not" out of the Decalogue. Strike out these words, and the itineraney absolutely has no constitutional regulation whatever. There is no compulsory itineraney left. If the bishop is more inclined to itineraney than the average of men, then there will be more, if less, then there will be less of itineraney, than in the average of other churches. Of course, the average, on the whole, will be about the same. The M. E. Church has no longer any itineraney, any more than the Baptist or Episcopal. But the bishop is supreme.

My first objection is above stated. The itineraney would no longer be compulsory, and, therefore, as a distinction, would cease to exist.

My second objection is that the power in the hands of the bishops would be more than they could possibly manage; and the consequence would soon be a total loss of power. No wise man wishes power unrestrained by a constitution. It is the most mischievous policy possible to give it. No bishop should be forced to take it.

My third objection is the disingenuous or else undetectedly incorrect pretense that this change is small. This change would radically alter the relations of every Methodist minister to the denomination. When he entered the Conference, he supposed that at least every third year every appointment, including the largest and best, would be declared vacant; and every minister, not excepting the most admired and popular, should actually receive another appointment. This he knew would keep up a healthy circulation, and make the receiving of an appointment from the hands of the bishop honorable. But now, by a simple vote, the General Conference is asked to strike out two and

the only fundamental restrictions—to put a bullet through the very heart, and call it a small thing; because, forsooth, neither a bullet nor a heart is very large!

Suppose we should strike out of Article I, sec. 8, p. 1 of the Constitution of the United States only these three little words "For six years"; or out of Article II, sec. 1 the other three monosyllables "of four years," and what have you done? The great Republic is gone forever.

Any man has the right manfully to advocate anything that he supposes would be good. If the system of the Roman Catholic priesthood, celibacy and all, seems better than the Methodist, advocate it; if the purely democratic system of the Baptists and Congregationalists seems the best, advocate it; but do not call changing the Methodist system, as now proposed, a small change. Look the proposition fairly in the face, and be honest. Rather magnify than belittle the probable consequences. Wise statesmanship, especially in times of peace, counts all the possible cost of destructive propositions. Small! Should it be made, I think (perhaps I have needless fears) the M. E. Church would be less like what it was before than Rome as an empire was to Rome as a republic. Names would still remain; the essence would have departed. The itinerancy, instead of being as regular as the movements of the stars, would be a miscellaneous scramble and soon cease. I want no such itinerancy, not regulated by law.

I conclude, as I begun, by emphasizing the belief that the Baptist, Congregationalist, Protestant Episcopal, Presbyterian, and other forms of regulating the pastorate are good. But I do verily believe that the world is pretty well supplied with systems of that kind. Does it need any more of them? If the people want long pastorates, have they not the opportunity to enjoy them? If any minister desires that system, we should not blame him for putting himself where he may find it. If the cities need them, are they not supplied? But really the Protestant world does need one denomination *all* of whose ministers are itinerant and *all* of whose societies stand with and sustain an itinerant ministry. We have it. Let us continue to have it. Let us not surrender it. Let us not retreat. Let all our changes be toward heroism; not from it. Let us stand by our old flag to the death.

I purpose now to glance at the main arguments adduced for this proposed abolishment of the limitations, and will endeavor fairly to adduce the strongest that I have heard.

It is urged that some men cannot properly employ their talent in a term of three years. They are slow in making personal acquaintances, they execute broad plans, they often are just beginning to reap a harvest when the annual clock strikes three, and they must leave. Often young converts, probationers, need special attention; but the minister must drop the reins, resign them to one of a different temperament, perhaps a stranger. Disasters follow. Probationers are lost, reactions succeed revivals, church-building enterprises are dropped or imperiled, strangers half-won to the congregation retire, and members leave for some other fold.

I have stated this strongly. Having had much observation, I have seen two or three instances in which something of the kind was true; but it was because the following minister was unworthy of a place in a conference, and would probably have been a greater failure as a settled pastor. Indeed, I am disposed to allow that a weak and unfaithful man in a system of itinerancy may be tolerated to do more harm than he would in other systems, and I would look with favor upon some more rigid mode of inquiring into neglect and unfaithfulness.

Subjectively, the itinerant system has peculiar effects on the ministers themselves. The ablest and most industrious of the ministry have remarkably good opportunities for thoroughness of study. The professors in long-established and strong universities enjoy the best opportunities for thorough investigation, because their audiences are constantly changing. Similar is the condition of a good itinerant preacher; but a weak man may abuse his privileges. The itinerant system ought not to be abused to carry along men who would not be employed as preachers on any other system. Here is a spot where real reform is needed.

But usually the change of appointment is an advantage. No one instance settles a law. The Methodists seem to have endured this system well, and yet this objection is no stronger now than a hundred years ago. The most glorious results of the itinerancy often follow when the parting seemed most grievous and the change

most unpropitious. The law of averages must decide it. One of the ablest ministers I ever knew, who passed his fiftieth year of work in the itinerancy, saw but few converted; but always left his churches in good condition and congregations large, and his successors usually had great revivals. In no other system would he have been likely to accomplish so much. As a presiding elder he had no superior, and I doubt whether the greatest revivalist in the conference was actually so useful as he.

A limited term of service in the presidency of the United States has its disadvantages; but, in the opinion of the framers of the Constitution, the advantages outweighed them.

Every system has its compensations. Our ministers become quick and expert. Our societies are accustomed to new pastors. Our machinery is adjusted to the work. "Ephraim shall not envy Judah and Judah shall not vex Ephraim."

Again, men of colossal reputation as permanent pastors, like the late Dr. Spring, of New York, sometimes are referred to as proofs of the excellence of long pastorates. This is just. Let every system be judged by its best fruits.

But look at the similar products of the itinerancy. Who have won the most souls to Christ? Think of such men as Valentine Cook (alumnus of our first college), George Pickering, Heman Bangs, Alfred Cookman, and others of this type—pure itinerants, who spent their whole lives in the itinerant ministry. Then add to them some of our men called a part of the time to other labor, like some of our bishops, and such men as Nathan Bangs, Durbin, McClintock, and Eddy, and where will you find men under any other system whom God has more honored? Force us not to odious comparisons; but certainly the itinerancy has no occasion to shrink from the ordeal of facts.

But, third, it is warmly argued that we should try to command all these advantages of all kinds. The itinerancy is good, and we will have it even after the limitations are abolished, and we can also have long pastorates. There, probably, is the great mistake. Incongruities cannot be commanded in one homogeneous system. A locomotive is a thing of beauty and of power; so is a steamboat; but perhaps it would surpass even the genius of an Edison to devise a tug that would answer equally well on the iron rails and on the water. As theologians, we are inclined to the theory that the Lord made the species, and not evolution, without an Evolutor; and, though Coleridge tells us "metaphysicians must distinguish where they cannot divide," we do not feel inclined to mix what will not mingle. "Thou shalt not yoke an ox and an ass together." Of course, you are reminded of the minister who gravely responded to his brother of another denomination: "Brother, how dare you hint that I am an ox?" We call no names. Oxen are good in their place, and so are asses, and so even are goats; but then animals are not all alike and, according to Scripture, should not work under the same yoke. Some burrow and some migrate. Some sit still much of the time and some run. When one organization, tries to combine in itself itinerancy and settled pastorates, it will probably soon exhibit sorry specimens of neither and both. Methodist ministers are said to be good judges of horses; but neither ministers nor people would have any fondness for a mule.

I do not deny that, in coming time, it may be possible for some two, three, or four evangelical denominations to unite, and show the world a binary or ternary solar system, or ecclesiastical constellation, that shall harmonize all the best and all the needed methods of Christian work. The XXth century may see more than the XIXth has dreamed of. Let our Ecumenical Conferences, and Pan Councils, and Evangelical Alliances try to do something more than speak and read essays and orations, and provide for *bona-fide* co-operation. Let our leading denominations think of some mode of union, so that each should heartily rejoice in the success of the others. Let us try to devise some means whereby all differences about legitimacy of ordination and of communion may be "buried by baptism," or in some other way, a thousand fathoms deep and beyond a resurrection; and, perhaps, by and by, we may see some organization of organizations, which shall embrace missions (home and foreign), settled pastorates, and itinerancy, and all other proper varieties of Christian activity. But the dream cannot be filled out by any one denomination, as yet. Certainly Methodism is in no condition to take so dangerous a step as this proposed. The hight of statesmanship is to do the best thing possible

now. If ever a great union of Christians is brought about—which may the Lord grant—it will not be a homogeneous mass of Baptists, Congregationalists, and so on, down through the the alphabet; but there will be a federation or alliance of parts which will preserve their several typical peculiarities.

At present there is but one great denomination that has a regularly itinerant ministry We dare not sacrifice it. We dare not weaken it. Other denominations have borrowed some of our usages, and perhaps we have met them half way. When they propose to organize an itinerancy, it may do for us to think about meeting them on that line; but if we now weaken this peculiar engine of ours, the world will lose an agency certainly one of the mightiest developed in the progress of Christendom.

But, again, it is argued that we are wrong in insisting that the itinerancy would suffer danger by what is proposed. Why, now, several ministers, even in our oldest conferences, are moved at the end of two years; some at the end of one year. No law compels it. Now, take off all law, and the removals would go on just as regularly

Do these men really think so? Let me give them a hint or two. About one-twentieth of the active ministers cease to travel every year, by superannuation, dropping from trial, location, death, and other causes. More—say one-fifteenth—enter. Now, besides the one-third of the churches that must have new pastors by the rule, there are several more that must have new pastors because there are not old ones enough. They cannot always be well supplied by the new men. There is an easy opportunity to improve the condition of some one and two years men. Of course, when changes are made honorable by the great number compelled, and opportunities to improve the condition of the others arise, considerably more than one-third will be changed. But take off the limitation, and leave nothing but the will of the bishop, and we should see — what we should see. That for a time, by power of tradition, things might move on tolerably well in the old ruts I doubt not. Time would soon tell another story. But it is all theoretical. It would be radically different from the present. I think we had better wait till the Keeley motor is perfected and reduced to manageable control before we try the new machine.

There may be also a contingency which I hardly want to hint, but fidelity to my subject requires it. Some of the states are tyrannically loose in their treatment of ecclesiastical bodies. If the Discipline does not imperatively and impartially require itinerancy at the end of a stated time, but leaves it to the decision of a bishop, modified gradually, as his decision will inevitably soon come to be, by the wishes of the pastor and his church, it is more than possible that, if any church and pastor should refuse to dissolve their relation at any time, and appeal to the courts to sustain them, they would neither be compelled to obey the bishop nor to withdraw from the denomination. There have been some decisions of late with reference to Roman Catholic bishops and pastors which indicate that the less the working of a system is made dependent on a mere human will the safer it is for all concerned. At present our system has been tried, and the courts have established precedents in our favor. Let well enough alone.

If this change were made, I very much fear that soon the opinion would be that all the need the denomination would have for bishops would be to station unacceptable ministers over disagreeable churches. In other words, the weakest churches and the weakest ministers would be in the hands of the bishops. The rest would take care of themselves. If we want to kill the itinerancy, let us do it squarely in front, and not by a shot in the back.

But we are told that a list of exceptions is provided in the Discipline. Why not add another? The old camel and the tent are on exhibition. "*Exceptio probat regulam.*" Yes, if it *is* an exception, of course, it proves the rule. But if it is something that ought not to be an exception, and you make it such, then it nullifies the rule. Artificial exceptions are nuisances. God's laws have none, and so with the best of human laws.

Men are now allowed to be reckoned as members of the conferences who manage our book concerns, edit our papers, take charge of our missions and other similar societies, preside over and teach in our schools, and who are reappointed without limit of time. Also chaplains of institutions and those who labor among people who speak another language, and who have not

societies enough to allow an itinerancy, and some who preach to seamen and in some peculiar home missions, are not compelled to remove at the end of the third year.

The argument has some force; yet these exceptions are already too numerous. So far as my observation has gone, the home missions and preaching to sailors—migratory as these congregations are—would have prospered better under the itinerant system. Chaplaincies in reformatory institutions may properly be treated as exceptions for a time. The members of conferences in our colleges and schools ought to be subject to the Church appointing power, and not to imagine that they have any permanent right to their places. If at the beginning our Church had insisted on having at least one seminary in every conference, as good as they could obtain, and had held it strictly under the same rules as every one of the churches, I have no doubt that education among us would have been far in advance of what it is now. The idea would have gone up into our colleges, and have in some way borne good fruit. Who one hundred and fifty years ago could have foreseen the results of an itinerant ministry? Who would not have ridiculed it? If the schools had been subjected to it, the result might have been equally good. Let the exceptions, then, be genuine. God's laws have no real exceptions. A rule too much overloaded becomes contemptible.

There may be some who imagine that to remove the limitations would inure to the temporal advantage of the ministers. They are much mistaken. There is no ministry in the world so generally beloved and cared for by the people as an itinerant ministry. In England the Methodist ministers have, indeed, no princely incomes, like some in the National Church; nor have they any half-starved curates. In our own country, divided into local conferences, we have a great variety; and, indeed, we have hundreds of ministers who show all the self-denial and heroism of the best days. But their people too are in the heroic stage of history. Our young conferences are profiting by the example of the older. Great exceptional salaries often do but little good to the true cause of Christ. Nothing probably knits the hearts of pastors and people more firmly together than the conviction of the laity that the preachers cling to the itinerancy for the universal good.

We do not deny that there are evils connected with an inflexible itinerancy. All created things have evils. The oldest book, perhaps, extant inquires: "What! shall we receive good at the hands of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?" Of course, he did not mean sin; but just what he said. Those who set themselves to the removal of all evils (not sins) in any human or even divine structure usually make sorry work of it. Suppose Christ's teachings were so smoothed down that there was not a sentence or word liable to misconstruction. Who ever saw a house or ship that had not some inconveniences? There are evils connected with steam-engines, such as explosions; evils in gas, such as an offensive odor, capricious meters, and large bills; evils in electric light, yet to be made known. Congregationalism has its evils, long pastorates have their evils, itinerancy has its evils; but what is the algebraic sum of the good and evil when a balance is struck? Can you have the good of a thing after you have so modified it that it can do no harm? We would cling to nothing because it is old, nor adopt anything because it is new. Every safe man, every vital institution is both progressive and conservative. My belief is that Methodist itinerancy is yet too young and active and vigorous and successful to be cut down or endangered, and that it does not need to have any other shoot grafted into any of its branches. Do not try to raise apples and quinces on the same stock. Different trees are more economical. If our tree has been neglected, and has become somewhat burdened with what springs from another root, clear it of incumbrances, trim it a little, and let it grow. It is good for another century; it is not hollow; it has made as much wood during the last twelve months as in any year before; it brings forth its fruit every month, and its leaves are for the healing of the nations; and, surely, the generation now under its branches will not venture to raise against it the murderous ax. "Woodman, spare that tree!"

THE ITINERANCY NOT UNALTERABLE.

BY GEORGE R. CROOKS, D.D., LL.D.

THE Modification of the Itinerancy is now with Methodists a living question. It is one of the questions, too, which may be very properly marked as "urgent." Fortunately, the hesitancy once so common in the Church to speak frankly on the subject has disappeared. The fear that a few plain words might possibly break up the whole exterior economy of Methodism is now abandoned as absurd. It is possible to get at the real opinions of representative men, and to have an honest consideration of the arguments for or against change. As my own faith has long since been declared, it is only necessary for me here to give reasons for it to the many Methodist readers of THE INDEPENDENT.

Any one who searches the facts will soon discover that the Itinerancy as John Wesley and the first American bishop, Francis Asbury, designed it to be has long since disappeared. We have no itinerancy now in the sense of these two founders. Wesley's purpose was that his preachers should be a flying column, always on the march. As late as 1788 he writes that no preacher ought to stay at any place a week together. "That," he adds, "is not the Methodist plan at all. It is a new abuse." He asks, in 1774, how a Methodist preacher can preserve either bodily health or spiritual life if he stays in a city "two or three months at a time, preaching on Sunday mornings and two or three evenings in the week." Scotland greatly troubled him, for the tendency there was to settled pastoral relations. But he resisted inflexibly, writing to one of his Scotch friends: "While I live, itinerant preachers shall be itinerants." Wesley was so wedded to this system of incessant motion that he declared to Lady Maxwell his hope that it would endure "till our Lord comes to reign upon earth."

The Wesleyans have very prudently required of their ministers less than the perpetual motion which their founder contemplated, although they are restricted by the three-years term, which he inserted in his famous "Deed of Declaration." In the United States the same purpose to make the itinerancy intensely itinerant has yielded to the pressure of necessity. In 1774 all the preachers in America were ordered to change at the end of six months, and the next year many of them at the end of three months. Even as late as 1794 they were required to change as often as once each half year. They were in those days literally travelers.

It will be readily supposed that men with families could not meet the requirements of such a life of incessant motion; in point of fact, the majority of preachers who organized the Church in 1784 were celibates. Bishop Asbury, who had in his mind an institute as stern as Loyola's, discouraged the marriage of the preachers and sometimes disparaged those who did marry. "Ah!" he says in his journal, "how hardly shall they who have families growing up enter into and keep in the traveling connection." An amusing story is told of a circuit in Kentucky or Tennessee, where all the itinerants placed in charge eventually married. To put a stop to this, Asbury sent thither two almost decrepit men; but, to his astonishment, at the end of the year they were married. He gave it up, saying: "I am afraid the devil and the women will get all my preachers."

As no provision was made in the Discipline for the support of the wives of itinerants, the preference of Asbury for single men will be readily appreciated. Unless the married preacher had resources of his own, his privations were intolerable. The effect can be seen in a fact incidentally noticed by the Church historians. As late as 1809 all the preachers of the Virginia Conference were celibates. It was the commonest of events for a married itinerant to return, when in the prime of life, to his farm or his business, in order to educate his children. Such a system could not be adjusted to the ordinary relations of human life; and so it came to pass that the claims of preachers as heads of households had to be considered. The itinerant was allowed to set up a home and become eligi-

ble to the enjoyment of it for two years in one place.

Another important modification of the itinerancy has been effected without any aid from legislation. The bishops had originally the power to transfer the preachers at will from one conference to another. Asbury would have been thunderstruck if his right to send any one of his host of helpers without warning from north to south or from south to north had been for an instant disputed. The itinerants were to him literally so many pieces on a chessboard, to be played as he thought best. It must be confessed that he moved the pieces with skill, and, the rigid conditions of the system once satisfied, with fatherly tenderness. Incessant change and the power of transfer were the right and left arms of the Methodist system. "I have not yet," he writes in his journal, soon after visiting this country, "a circulation of the preachers." He had it in time, by leading the way himself. It is well known to Methodists that the practice of transferring ministers has fallen into abeyance. Transfers now are made at the instance mostly of important churches. In ordinary cases they are apt to be resisted by the preachers, as an infringement upon their conference privileges. These objections are not always regarded; but they have had the effect to reduce transfers to a very small percentage of the whole number of appointments.

Here are two particulars in which the itinerancy has been so metamorphosed that it has almost lost its identity. It has from the beginning been subject to another limitation: it has never been squarely applied; and this not from partiality, but solely from necessity. In John Wesley's "Deed of Declaration," which fixed the three-years pastoral term for the English preachers, ordained ministers of the State Church are specially exempted from the application of the rule. Wesley had called to his annual conferences clergymen of the Church of England who were in the enjoyment of livings; and he had the good sense to try to retain them, though at the cost of a sacrifice of his fundamental principle. The adoption of the two-years term by the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1804 was accompanied with the announcement of exceptions. The first exempts were the presiding elders, who were given a four-years term; then follow editors and book stewards. The classes excepted from the operation of the present three-years rule are over twenty; and the number of excepted ministers, including presiding elders, is probably not far from one thousand. The exceptions are very properly made. The relaxing of the iron rule of the itinerancy as to them all shows administrative wisdom; but it shows, too, that the realization of John Wesley's ideal of ministerial life is an impossibility.

There was once a reason for keeping the traveling preachers in constant motion, which is not operative now; the fear was that some of them might grow to such popularity and power as to make them dangerous. Such a fear was, under the circumstances, not surprising. For many years Asbury was the only bishop; his powers were frequently called in question. The General Conference of 1792 long debated the point whether a preacher, when dissatisfied with his station, should not have a right of appeal, against the bishop, to his conference. Asbury shows his dread of the local influence of the itinerants in many ways. He wishes a circulation of the preachers, "in order," he says, "to avoid partiality and popularity." He would suffer no man to take root and become strong. There is no apprehension of such danger now. The Episcopacy is well consolidated and has grown in the affections of the Church. Its authority is universally recognized, and much for the reason that the bishops have used their power with singular moderation. But unless one studies Asbury's journal closely, he will scarcely be able to appreciate how much this dread of successful resistance to the system oppressed his mind. In his view, the cities and the country had opposite interests, and he was resolved that the cities should not bear sway. In his valedictory address, delivered near the close of his life, he says: "Locality is essential to towns and cities; traveling is as essential to the country. . . . Guard against two orders of preachers—one for the country, the other for the cities. The latter generally settle themselves to purchase ministers; and men of gifts and learning too often set themselves to sale." As in an army, Asbury will have the whole host obey the word of their chief. He must know, when he says to one "go," that he goeth; and to another "come," that he cometh; and to still another "do this," that he doeth it.

The most conservative of Methodists may,

therefore, reasonably anticipate that the itinerancy will continue to be subject to modification. This, as proved by history, is the law of its being. A flexible instrument, it adapts itself readily to the growth of society. I share in the conservative feeling which dreads unnecessary innovation. I see no reason, when a good system has been established, why it should be summarily turned upside down. But conservatism, to be wise, must accept the law of progress; or, to speak more accurately, the law of growth. We need not move from our old foundations; but we can make our house broader and more spacious, so that it shall be a satisfactory home for us all. In another article consideration will be given to the present needs of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Let me not be thought, in what I have hitherto said, to disparage Bishop Asbury. I have an unbounded admiration for his administrative genius and reverence for his spotless character. More than that, his policy was, without doubt, the wisest that, under the circumstances, could be pursued. Had the early preachers remained in the cities, the Church would have been to-day little and unknown. The Revolutionary War had ruined the Church of England throughout the South; thousands of its members were in a condition to be easily swept into the Methodist fold; the migration to the West had begun; roads thither were few and communication across the Alleghenies was extremely difficult. A missionary system employing mounted itinerants was precisely suited to the period. Now, however, the continent has been covered, lines of communication are created in advance of civilization, and on these towns and cities grow up. A new problem confronts Methodism: how to hold successfully what has been won. Its army of invasion has become an army of occupation; the flying column is now settled in fortified posts. The itinerant has become a pastor; under trying conditions to be sure, but a pastor nevertheless. The cities have grown to be centers of power in a sense unknown to Asbury's time. Concessions have been made to their wants, from sheer necessity. In 1856 the rule which required a minister who had been in a city four years to go out of it for four years was abolished; and in 1864 the pastoral term was lengthened one year. We are not where we were in the last century. We have kept the old names, but are living under an altered condition of facts.

There are many well-meaning Methodists who speak of the itinerancy as though they thought its conservation to be the chief end of the existence of the Church. In truth, however, the itinerancy is a means, and the Church the end. It is an implement, just as a scythe, a saw, or a spade is an implement. An implement made up of living men gathers about it in the course of years the fondest affections of which we are capable, and the Methodist itinerancy has been no exception to this law of our nature. Its history is a history of heroism, of privations patiently endured, of sacrifices cheerfully made. It deserves, as it enjoys, the love of all Methodists; they must, however, see the plain fact that, like man himself, it has never continued in one stay. Unless we believe that we have reached the limit of Church growth, we must expect still other mutations; the past in this respect prefigures the future. Asbury himself claimed that the readiness of the Church to adopt useful modifications of polity was one of its excellencies. He writes: "Many other Churches go upon the paths already trodden two or three hundred years. We formed our own Church, and claim the power of a reform every four years." This free spirit has given to American Methodism one of its chief distinctions —a wonderful display of administrative genius.

There is a growing restlessness of preachers and people under the present conditions of the itinerancy. Families become weary of incessant pastoral changes, and drop out of the churches. They ought to be loyal enough to the system to sacrifice their personal preferences; but, unfortunately, they are not. These losses are becoming serious, and call for a remedy. Then, again, many of our most desirable preachers are spirited away from us. To the honor of all parties, let it be said, they leave openly and are suffered to go without reproach. Many think that we can readily afford such losses; but that is not my opinion. A trained minister, who has grown to be effective, is a valuable possession. We do not fill his place by taking in a raw recruit. The ministers who have left are, no doubt, building up the cause of Christ; but they are not building up the Methodist Episcopal Church, whose endowments and living teachers prepared them for their calling.

I have no desire to go into the controversy in relation to the increase or decrease of Methodism in the great cities. While the Church is making prodigious forward strides all over the country, something more should be shown for the cities than a mere holding of its own or a slow advance. The leading Protestant Church in the Union, ours does not usually lead in the cities. To be proportionately represented, it should be as predominant in the chief centers of population as in the country at large. Notoriously, city populations attach themselves to individuals, and slightly to denominations. A city minister who successfully fills his position builds himself in time to an influence which is felt the entire city through. The gains made by him each successive year are utilized; whereas, with us the gains of a three-years term are apt to be lost. Does any one suppose that Mr. Spurgeon could have been the power that he is in London if he had been shifted from church to church? Or does any one suppose that he could begin and do again what he has successfully done during the last twenty years? Yet he can now *hold* with an easy mastery all that he has won. Our ministers, with short terms, cannot accumulate power; other ministers, having more favorable conditions, can. The question is: "Is it desirable for us to try to gain this advantage? And, if so, how shall it be gained?" And let it be borne in mind, as we turn the question over, that our cities are growing faster than the country. If we fail in them, the failure will in the course of a generation or two be very disastrous.

There are signs of discontent with pastoral life which deserve the consideration of thoughtful Methodists. In no other Protestant Church are ministers as ready as in our own to leave the pastorate for literary or administrative positions which promise permanence. The General Conference having a large patronage of this kind to bestow, there has grown up a keen competition for the offices at its disposal. Its appointing function has largely superseded the legislative. For months before its meeting the air is full of rumors of prospects, bad or good, of the many candidates. The secular papers enter into the fray, and discuss (as news, to be sure) the probabilities with as much relish as if a Methodist General Conference were a political convention. The readiness of capable men to forsake the pastorate for non-pastoral offices is a singular phenomenon in the Christian Church. It might be thought to argue a slight esteem for the "cure of souls"; but such is not the fact. No men more intensely love their proper vocation of preaching than do Methodist ministers. But it does prove a desire to get on firmer standing-ground than the Itinerancy now affords. In other Churches, such preachers as Storrs, Tyng, Taylor, and Talmage would not dream of leaving their pulpits for the work of secretaries or editors. There is no rivalry in their denominations for secretarial or editorial places. A successful pastorate fills the ambition of a Presbyterian, Congregationalist, or Episcopalian minister. Ought it not to be so with us? If it is so with us, why, then, the undisguised electioneering for General Conference and other offices of permanent tenure? It seems to me that this restiveness is a symptom that the yoke of the Itinerancy chafes somewhere. Is it not possible to hold fast to all the advantages which our system gives us, and yet to relieve this too heavy pressure?

Now, the itinerancy is a compact, and can last no longer than the parties to the compact agree to adhere to its terms. On Protestant principles, the right to choose a minister is with the worshiping congregation. This right has been waived in the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the patronage of all the pulpits lodged with the General Conference. Under the operation of Protestant principles, the pastors have a right to a choice in the selection of their fields of labor. Methodism acknowledges no *divine* authority in a bishop to assign a minister to his place. Both parties, ministers and laymen, have, however, surrendered their claims, and have committed the selection of pastors and churches to the bishops, acting as the agents of the General Conference. The system has been a splendid success; but it can be worked successfully only as it enjoys the hearty good will of the Church. Symptoms of restiveness under the burden ought to suggest to the minds of our administrators the provision of measures of relief. It seems to me that the call for relief has now grown loud enough and strong enough to deserve attention. We ought to prepare ourselves to meet the double question: "How shall we preserve the essential vigor of the itinerancy, and at the same time satisfy the demand for more lasting pastoral relations?"

I use advisedly the words "preserve the essential vigor of the itinerancy"; and because I desire to see its vigor preserved I deprecate the Brooklyn movement. That movement offers a remedy which it seems to me the Church will not accept. Its promoters (who, by the way, are the best and truest of Methodists) say that their plan has the merit of simplicity. And so has the cutting off of a man's head the merit of simplicity; but the man dies, nevertheless. We have only to take the little word "not" out of several of the Ten Commandments to change the moral standard of all Christendom. The simplicity of the method by which a change can be effected is not a sufficient argument for the change. The argument must show a probability of beneficial consequences. Let us suppose that, according to this plan, all legal limit is taken from our pastoral term. Removal can then be made only for cause; it must be incumbent on some person or persons to show cause; and the showing of cause will naturally create party spirit and strife. The bishops will not very cheerfully assume the new burden which will then be put upon them. Indeed, they will be unable to carry such a burden without ceasing to be general superintendents and becoming more or less diocesan.

Whether a minister has or has not outlived his usefulness in a church is often one of the hardest questions to determine. Decay of usefulness is usually a very gradual process. Some imagine it when it does not exist; others do not see it when to the eyes of their neighbors it is very plain. Experience has proved that the average duration of the pastorate in the Baptist churches is three years; in the Presbyterian churches, longer; the Congregationalist churches are so restless that the majority of their ministers are not settled at all. We Methodists have, therefore, already reached the average length of the pastorate in the United States through our three-years rule. We may wisely now extend the term, so as to enable pastors and churches to accumulate power in important situations. What we need is to be more *felt* in the great centers; and we can only effect this through picked men, who are suffered to stay long enough in each church to do complete work. A longer term, with a legal limit, would accomplish this result with the least friction. It should be, in my opinion, a term of five or seven years. The privilege of an extended pastorate may be guarded by restrictions sufficient to protect it from abuse. Unless, however, every term, long or short, comes to its end by a fixed law, we shall be plunged into the troubles which are so keenly felt in the other Protestant Churches.

Such a change would be in the line of past progress; would be conservative, as well as progressive; would leave us a way of retreat, if it should prove to be disastrous; and even as an experiment would go far to content the churches and the ministers.

THE NECESSITY AND PRACTICABILITY OF MODIFICATION.

BY H. K. CARROLL.

In discussing the question of modifying the Itinerancy, it is indispensable, first of all, to prove clearly that there is a *necessity* for modification. Unless this can be done satisfactorily, the demand for a change must remain ungranted. The admitted advantages of the Itinerancy, the great successes which have been obtained through its operation, and the fact that many millions of people in various lands accept and approve it should prevent hasty and ill-considered action in making alterations in it. Those who ask for the removal of the limitation of the pastorate, or even for an extension of it to six or seven years, must give facts and reasons in support of their petition sufficient to convince the General Conference that what is asked for is not only reasonable and practicable, but indispensable to the continued welfare of the Church.

It is well to state, at the outset, that not one of the friends of modification would be willing to surrender the Itinerancy for the settled pastorate. If they are convinced that the Itinerancy has some serious disadvantages, they are quite sure that the settled pastorate has greater difficulties and less general efficiency. To them it is simply a question of adaptation of a successful plan to the exigencies of changed conditions; not of destruction of that plan. Whether any of the alterations suggested would lead practically to the overthrow of the system is a question which we reserve for consideration further on.

The Methodist Episcopal Church is not a local or sectional body; but national in extent. No other denomination is more widely diffused among the states and territories, or more truly national in spirit, feeling, and aims. It desires most earnestly to reach all classes of the population in all parts of the country. Special efforts are made to extend the influence of the Church among the Germans, the Scandinavians, the Chinese, the Negroes, and the Indians, and among the neglected classes everywhere. Hundreds of thousands of dollars are raised by the Church every year for this laudable purpose. The object in view is not denominational aggrandizement, but the fulfillment of Christ's command: "Preach the Gospel to every creature." Wherever there are people who are not reached by evangelizing agencies, there the Methodist Church believes it has a divine call to work. These neglected fields are to be found both in city and in country. In the supplying of destitute places in rural districts no church has displayed more energy and achieved greater success than the Methodist; but in cities the results have not been altogether satisfactory. American Methodism had its rise in three of our leading cities almost simultaneously—New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore—and grew up with the younger cities of the West. It has had full opportunity, in its history of more than a century, to obtain a commanding position in the cities, as it has done in the rural districts. That it has not succeeded in doing so has been most clearly and convincingly shown. In THE INDEPENDENT and in *The Methodist Quarterly Review* of January, 1878, statistics have been given, proving that in respect to ratio of members to population there is one member of the Methodist Episcopal Church in every twenty-nine of the rural population, while in the cities the ratio is one in every forty-six. These figures have not been proved to be wrong, although attempts have been made to explain away their significance. These attempts were all made fruitless by the fact that the Presbyterians were shown to have the same ratio of members to population in the cities as in the country, and the Episcopalians a ratio of three to one in favor of the cities.

Much more than these figures show is evident to every intelligent observer respecting the position and influence of our Church in the cities. It is seen that we do not build up great churches, like other denominations, which gather in men of wealth, of culture, and of influence, and thus obtain power not only to buy and hold the most eligible sites and build im-

posing edifices, but to open missions and chapels in destitute places and to scatter through the whole community their benevolent blessings. There is nothing to be ashamed of in the fact that we minister to the lower classes. Christ himself is our excellent example. But we need not and should not fail to reach and hold the higher classes. Churches of other denominations stand in the great cities among the best-known and most highly-esteemed institutions. They wield a vast influence in their respective communities and have even a national reputation. It is not so with Methodist churches. We strive in vain for anything beyond a restricted local influence. There is an iron rule which forbids the development of individual strength and influence and compels a rigid equality among the churches. We insist on marching our churches forward in one unwavering line, shoulder to shoulder, compelling the stronger to wait for the weaker. Of necessity, the march is an exceedingly difficult and slow one, and results in the sacrifice of golden opportunities.

The same inflexible rule which hampers the churches in like manner circumscribes the power and opportunities of the ministers. It insists on putting them all on the same level, restraining the stronger for the benefit of the weaker. The theory is Procrustean. Those of ability and popular gifts are required, by the strict interpretation of the theory, to contribute of their abundance to the general fund, so to speak, and thus help the lowest in the scale of strength and availability. The Itinerancy is rightly conceded to be an institution which demands sacrifices, and that leading ministers are restive under it is evident to all observers. Those who continue in the pastorate, despite the difficulties which hedge them in, find some relief in the transfer system. Some secede to other denominations, and many, who would make strong, popular pastors, are easily induced to accept official positions, either under or outside the General Conference. There are men, now otherwise employed, who ought to be pastors, and would be if they could be under conditions similar to those enjoyed by leading pastors of other denominations who cannot be tempted to forsake the pulpit for other lines of work. What is the course of our prominent pastors? A short term in Boston, a flight to Brooklyn, a removal to New York, a longer journey to Chicago, a return to Philadelphia, three years in Baltimore. In this round eighteen years may be spent, and the result is, the minister's power and influence are scattered. It is impossible for him to become identified with the interests and institutions of any of the cities in which he serves. Ministers of other denominations become useful and influential citizens, leading in every good work, swaying public opinion, and thus strengthening their denominations. Our Medo-Persian law of the Itinerancy makes no account of the power obtained in this way, and yet we have colleges to be endowed, we have missions and other benevolent enterprises which need money—the honest money of wealthy Christians. It is of vital importance to us to make strong and secure our position in the cities; and this we never can do, whatever other obstructions may lie in the way, until our churches and ministers can be associated upon terms permitting extended pastorates.

It is indispensable to the welfare of churches that they should have good pastoral service. No strong, permanent, and influential churches can be built up, either in city or village, without it. This fact is too plain to need argument. Another fact, also beyond question, is that there cannot be good pastoral service unless the minister becomes intimately acquainted with his flock; and it follows, as a matter of course, that the minister cannot become intimately acquainted with his flock suddenly. He comes to them a stranger. He must gain their confidence, their love gradually, by association. City people are more conventional and less accessible than country people; so that time is of the utmost importance in establishing a close and efficient pastoral relation with them. The members of a city congregation must also have the assurance of a reasonable probability of permanency of the pastoral relation before they will seek an intimate acquaintance with their minister. Permanency is impossible under our present rule, and this naturally creates reluctance on the part of many to enter upon intimate relations which must inevitably be broken off after a brief period. The family physician is not dismissed without cause. He comes to know the physical state of every member of the family, whether there are any constitutional difficulties, or bodily weak-

nesses, or tendencies toward certain diseases. This knowledge is of the utmost value to him when his professional skill is required. So it is with the pastor. It is indispensable for him to study characters, as for the physician to understand the physical characteristics of his patients. Parents wish for their children, especially amid the numberless temptations of city life, the strong controlling influence of a godly pastor. In how many cases can the itinerant minister obtain such an influence? For this reason thousands of families have left our Church and joined other denominations, and some of our churches have been ruined thereby. There is a church in New York City which has lost recently a large part of its members, who were scattered among other denominations, and who refused to return at the risk, they said, of having four pastors in three years; and it is significant that one of the best known and most benevolent of our laymen, while still regularly attending Methodist worship, rents a pew in a church of another denomination, for the avowed purpose of putting his children under the influence of a *pastor*. We cannot afford to lose such families. Is it not our true policy to make it possible for them to enjoy in our own Church what they now seek for in other denominations?

Is there a necessity for a modification of the Itinerancy? We might answer the question by asking another: Is it necessary for us to succeed in cities? What the cities are to other denominations they may become to us—sources of financial strength, whence streams may flow beneficently all over the thirsty country; centers of intellectual life, the products and inspiration of which may be diffused among all our country churches. What cities are in the commercial world they should be in our Church.

The question now to be considered is, whether such a modification of the Itinerancy as the necessities of the city churches require can be made without destruction of the system. We are not ready to surrender the Itinerancy. The changed condition of society has not made it useless. It is still admirably adapted to the needs and circumstances of large sections of our country, and must continue so to be for many, many years. It would be ruinous to take any step which would lead, immediately or at a remote period, to the substitution of a settled for an itinerant ministry. The Itinerancy works in rural districts with few disadvantages and little friction. Ministers come and ministers go annually, biennially, and triennially, according to circumstances, and the churches prosper. There is no necessity for interfering with the system so far as its operation in country places is concerned.

What modification can be made which will meet the necessities of city churches, without injuriously affecting country appointments? The plan of extending the pastoral term from three to six or seven years would relieve to a certain extent the city churches; but it would confer no great advantages on the country churches in general. Important financial projects and fruitful revivals would be as likely to need a pastor's special attention in the sixth year as they do now in the third. If the enforced removal of many pastors at the end of their third year inflicts serious injury upon the special work they may have in hand, and which none but they could so well perform, the adoption of the six or seven-year plan would not prove an efficacious remedy. The modification, moreover, is intended* only for special cases, and considerable management would be required to get the benefit of it. There are too many preliminaries to be settled before the bishop may venture to make an appointment for a fourth, a fifth, or a sixth year. The provision that a two-thirds vote of the Annual Conference must be secured, in addition to a similar vote in the Quarterly Conference, in every case where a pastoral term is extended beyond three years, is very objectionable. It by no means makes it more acceptable to say that it would give the Annual Conference the power to compel "influential congregations," which, "secure in their power to obtain transfers," have shown too little "respect" for that body, to "cultivate closer relations than they think important now." But a still stronger objection to the plan is that it would be an infringement of the prerogatives of the bishop presiding, who would not have the power to make certain appointments without the consent of the Conference. The plan originated in Australia in a non-episcopal Wesleyan body, and it is clearly not adapted in that form to our episcopal system. There is no middle ground between our episcopal system and the presbyterial

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* See *Methodist Quarterly Review* for January, 1880.

system of the Methodist Protestant Church; and, if the episcopacy is to continue to be a connectional bond—and it is a strong one—it is of the utmost importance not to diminish the episcopal power and prerogatives. If there is to be a class of appointments which the bishops cannot make without the consent of the Annual Conference; if the bishops are to relinquish to the Annual Conference the right to select their council, and thus become creatures of the Annual Conference; why not abolish the episcopacy in name, as well as in fact, and let the Annual Conferences elect presidents, as in the Methodist Protestant Church? The Australian plan is clearly not the proper method of modifying our Itinerancy; but, of course, the pastoral term could be extended to six or seven years without such conditions, and in some respects such a change would be an improvement. Six years is certainly better than three in city churches, as three is better than two. It would give a pastor many additional opportunities and add much to his power and influence. But at the end of the sixth year his hold on the people might be so strong that his inevitable removal would work more injury to the Church than if he had been removed at the end of three years. The reasons against a pastor's removal at the end of three years might be just as good or better at the end of six.

The Brooklyn plan, which removes the barrier to continued pastorates where such continuance is wise and beneficial, has the merit of being adjustable to all conceivable circumstances. No arbitrary principle determines the length of the pastoral term. As long as a minister is desired by a church, and it is seen that the best interests of that church are served by his return, it empowers the bishop to appoint him for another year. At the end of every year, according to the theory of the Itinerancy, every pastor restores to the officer of the General Conference (the patron of all the churches) delegated to receive it the church entrusted to him at the previous Conference, and every church becomes theoretically vacant once every year. The Brooklyn plan fits this theory perfectly. Whether every church shall receive the same pastor or a new one is left to the discretion of the presiding bishop, whose power under the new plan to move two-thirds of the members of the Conference, and return the other third to the same churches two, three, four, five, or ten or more years would rest on the same basis as that which he now exercises. The new plan would affect the episcopal system chiefly by enlarging its discretionary powers as to reappointments.

The fear that the removal of the limitation must soon lead to a settled pastorate, and the consequent destruction of the Itinerancy, is founded in a misapprehension of the character and necessities of the body of ministers and upon the impression that the law will be disregarded. Few of the defenders of the itinerant system fail to point to the frequent changes of ministers in other denominations which have a settled pastorate as proof that a sort of itinerancy prevails in all churches. It must be admitted that the illustration is a true and strong one; but it may be used very effectively in showing that the fears of a settled pastorate as a sequence of the Brooklyn plan are not well founded. The causes of frequent changes of a large proportion of ministers under the system of settled pastors are not peculiar to that system, but are found in the character of the ministers themselves and in the desires and needs of the churches. The reasons which lead to the removal of the great majority (estimated by some at 80 per cent.) of Methodist ministers before they have served three years would operate just as strongly under the Brooklyn plan as now. If the law of the Itinerancy were not grounded in necessity, the Itinerancy could not exist, no matter how strongly it was guarded by legislation. If the causes of frequent removal in other churches continue to operate in the Methodist Episcopal Church, it will be impossible, under any system, to prevent Itinerancy; and in order to make good the argument against the Brooklyn plan, it will be necessary for its opponents to prove that these causes do not exist or will be gradually removed, under the operation of the amendment. Moreover, if the Itinerancy is upheld by law alone, and does not exist because of a necessity, then we should expect that when the Brooklyn plan becomes law it will be administered likewise with fidelity, and loyally obeyed by all ministers and churches, simply because it is law. If the law were thus loyally obeyed, the Itinerancy would continue intact.

When we consider how large a proportion of ministers of other denominations make frequent removals, in spite of the

difficulties with which their system surrounds changes in pastorates, we ought not to take alarm at a proposition that those churches and pastors whose relations have been pleasant and profitable during three years should be permitted to continue in association, if they desire to, as long as the best interests of those concerned are served. There are some ministers who can do good work for one year, but not for a longer period. Some can maintain themselves two years, some three, some four, and so on. Churches are quick to notice decline in the power and freshness of their ministers, and are ready for "a change" the moment they discover the fact. The ministers themselves know very well when they have passed the line of usefulness in appointments, or when they have failed to meet the requirements of the churches to which they are sent. Churches vary in their character and needs, just as ministers do. The church at A—— needs a minister of certain temperament and qualifications; the church at B—— could best be served by a pastor of another type; the church at C—— would not be exactly suited with either of the ministers that are wanted at A—— and B——. Perhaps none of these churches will ever get just the men they want; consequently, they will welcome one pastor after another, and see them all go without much regret. The churches which would desire to keep their pastors many years would not be very numerous for years to come; but it is of vital importance to make provision for the requirements of the few, as we have already shown. Suppose the rule of the Itinerancy should be changed, so as to fix unalterably the pastoral term at ten years, permitting no exception except death and giving no alternative but resignation and withdrawal from the ministry. What would be the result? An almost universal rebellion. As well try to dam Niagara as prevent Itinerancy.

The impression that the removal of the limitation to the pastoral term would place the great majority of our ministers under grave disadvantages has, for some unaccountable reason, obtained a strong hold upon the mind of our Church. Many say that the proposed amendment is a blow at the equality of the ministry; that it would rob many a minister of an honorable ambition and cherished hopes. If this were true, it would be a strong argument against modification. That which strikes at the efficiency of the body of our ministry is capable of inflicting the most serious injury upon the Church. The younger ministers, especially, must be encouraged to study and strive for a higher plane of piety, culture, and power. They should have high aims and be accorded all the advantages possible. But there is nothing in the proposed modification to strangle hope or prevent ambition. The Itinerancy does not make men equal; it only gives them equal advantages. The Itinerancy is partly founded on differences between ministers. These differences are differences in mental endowment, in mental culture, in character, and could not, even if it were desirable, be equalized. The fear seems to be that the practical effect of the proposed amendment will be to put all the strong ministers into the strong churches, and keep them there, to the exclusion of the others, who will thus have no opportunity for promotion. The answer to this is that it will be possible then for the poorest preacher in the ministry to become pastor of the best church on precisely the same conditions as now—*i. e.*, by so improving himself as to become fitted for the position. No bishop would appoint to St. Paul's, New York, St. John's, Brooklyn, or Centenary Church, Chicago, any except a first-class minister. He would be recreant to his duty if he did otherwise. The best ministers now get the best churches; not only in their own particular conferences, but in all others, thanks to the transfer system. And so it would be if the limitation were removed. All any minister can reasonably ask for is a fair chance to meet the conditions required to obtain the best pastorates. It is in the ministry as in the law and other professions: "There is always room at the top." Those at the bottom must not expect to go to the top at one bound.

The operation of the proposed amendment would tend to increase the number of desirable pastorates, and thus multiply, rather than diminish, the chances of aspirants. It is not to be supposed that every desirable pastorate will be immediately occupied and held for twenty or forty years by the same pastors. In a possible list of two hundred or three hundred churches there will occur vacancies—some by death and many by election to General Conference offices, to positions in colleges, and the like; so that thousands of ministers might indulge the hope of being

promoted to the first churches, just as they do now.

The Itinerancy would neither be threatened with destruction by the adoption of the Brooklyn plan, nor the ministers with deprivation of equal privileges. It is difficult to see how the bishops could be embarrassed by the proposed enlargement of their discretionary powers, or how the connectional bond would be weakened. On the other hand, the advantages are manifest, the necessities are pressing, the remedy is practicable.

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